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**Transformative learning in an online context:
The experiences of non-traditional learners in
a Scottish HEI**

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Doctorate of Education

The Open University

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This thesis is dedicated to Stuart, Elsa and Zak for their patience and understanding, Kathleen for her support and constant encouragement and Dr. Lore Arthur who has been a guiding light throughout my journey.

Abstract

This thesis explores non-traditional learners' retrospective experiences of transformative learning having completed an online Childhood Practice Degree one year prior to participating in this research project. The central aim was to investigate the nature of learners' transformations and establish the potential of the online context as a space capable of fostering transformative learning. Using a purposive sampling strategy, nineteen graduates were selected to take part in the research. Adopting a qualitative approach based on a constructivist view of human knowledge, semi-structured asynchronous email interviews were used to collect the data. A total of three hundred and ten email exchanges took place. As an online method the email interview offered space to reflect and space to be silent which increased reflexivity for participants to construct, reflect upon and learn from their responses. Data was analysed using a hybrid thematic approach which recognised the inherent interplay between inductive and deductive analysis.

Findings indicate that the process of interactivity is fundamental to establishing the conditions capable of fostering transformative learning in an online context. While human interactivity lies at the heart of this process the technology acts as a significant enabler which has the capacity to create a level playing field and meeting the needs of non-traditional learners more effectively. The research findings confirmed the relational, intersubjective nature of transformative learning online and the significance of establishing relationships based on mutual recognition. There is also evidence to suggest that undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree can create conditions capable of promoting all three forms of self-awareness: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Research findings also support the current impetus to build on Mezirow's original work to develop a more unified perspective.

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Glossary of Acronyms

AoIR	Association of Internet Researchers
BB	Black Board
BERA	British Education Research Association
EdD	Doctorate of Education
ESREA	European Society for Research on the Education of Adults
HNC	Higher National Certificate
MEd	Master of Education
PAT	Personal Academic Tutor
PDA	Professional Development Award
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
REC1	Research Ethics Checklist 1
SCQF	Scottish Credit Qualification Framework
SERA	Scottish Education Research Association
SNNEB	Scottish Nursery Nurse Education Board
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
tDAP	Teaching Degree Award Powers
UHI	University of Highlands and Islands
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Chapter One Framing the Research

To know someone who thinks and feels with us, and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe 1749 – 1832).

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set the scene and outline the rationale for this thesis. In the first section an account of how I came to discover and develop an interest in transformative learning theory is provided. Secondly, I focus on the experiences of non-traditional learners when undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI). Due to widening participation and rising qualification requirements for employment, Scotland is witnessing a growing number of childhood practice professionals participating in Higher Education (HE). All those employed in this sector with management or leadership responsibilities are now legally required to be qualified to degree level. The Childhood Practice Degree is one of the awards that meets this requirement. In the third section I explore the online context as a potential space for fostering transformative learning. The rationale for this research project therefore centres on three aspects which have informed the overall structure of this chapter: my interest in transformative learning theory, the experiences of non-traditional learners when studying for a Childhood Practice Degree and the online context. In the final section of this chapter the research questions which have arisen from this rationale are outlined, the research boundaries are presented and an overview of subsequent chapters is provided.

Why transformative learning?

My knowledge and understanding of learning theories was initially informed by my experiences as an early years educator. After completing my undergraduate studies in July 1990 I gained employment in the early years sector where I remained for the next six years. During this time I was influenced by the work of Froebel (1887) and the learning theories of Piaget (1965), Bruner (1966), Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (1991). While undertaking a Master of Education (MEd) in 1992 I explored the research of Entwistle and Ramsden (1983), in particular their research on the three main approaches adult learners adopted: deep, surface and strategic. While I was yet to discover Mezirow's transformative learning theory, I was introduced to the concept of transforming where learners seek to understand, to see something in a different way and envisage that the new learning may change them as a person (Entwistle and Entwistle 1991).

In August 1996 I began my career as an adult educator in a further education (FE) college based in Scotland. As an adult educator I found myself initially drawing on my early years experiences, adapting and revising my understanding of developmental learning theories and the work of Entwistle and Ramsden (1983). I had an interest in the social and emotional dimensions of the adult learning process and as a result drew on Laevers *et al* (1997) key processes of well-being and involvement as a way of establishing adult learner engagement and achievement. I found myself returning to the concept of transforming noted in Entwistle and Entwistle (1991) but recognised a need to further my knowledge of this concept as well as adult learning theory more generally.

In preparing to write my Doctorate of Education (EdD) research proposal I re-engaged with the adult learning literature and it was at this juncture that I discovered Mezirow's transformative learning theory. I can only describe this as an 'eureka'

moment; a sudden realisation, an epiphany. Mezirow initially introduced the concept of transformative learning to the field of adult education in 1978, although the first comprehensive presentation of transformative learning theory was not published until 1991: *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (Mezirow 1991). Influenced by the writings of Freire (1970) and Illich (1970), Mezirow undertook a comprehensive national study of women returning to community colleges in the United States after a period of extended time away from education. In Mezirow's study, returning to college was for many women a painful process. According to Mezirow (1978) many of the women were driven by a growing awareness of the limitations placed upon them by traditional gender roles. They were overwhelmed by doubts about their ability to achieve in what they viewed as an unfamiliar and demanding academic world; they were women in transition. In order to see the alternatives that were open to them they had to transform their perspective and in doing so come to see more clearly the cultural assumptions and presuppositions influencing them. This then allowed them to develop a deeper level of self-understanding and to begin to explore new directions and consider an alternative life path.

Mezirow (1991) based the theory of transformative learning on the premise that learners acquire their values, views and ways of thinking and feeling through their interactions with others. As learners move into adulthood, situations may arise which present opportunities to reflect on their habits of mind and subsequent points of view. Engaging with the process of critical reflection and discourse may lead them to reassess the validity and authenticity of their habits of mind and become more aware of the subjectivity of their current thinking, feelings or actions. For it to be defined as transformative learning, Mezirow (2012) notes that a learner's habits of mind would have to significantly change based on the process of critical reflection and discourse or remain the same based on reasoned affirmation of their validity.

Throughout his career Mezirow remained committed to the view that transformative learning was a rational cognitive process.

To me the experience of discovering Mezirow's transformative learning theory felt like a missing jigsaw piece had been found. This research project provided me with the opportunity to explore further the concept of transformative learning theory beyond the confines of Mezirow's work. Although the origin of transformative learning theory can be attributed to Mezirow in the late 1970s, Gunnlaugson (2008) suggests that we are now in the second wave of theory development. More recently, Cranton and Taylor (2012) encourage a move towards a more unified theory of transformative learning which draws on the following broad dimensions: cognitive, emotional and social action. This is further supported by Illeris (2014a:40) who proposes a definition of transformative learning that acknowledges the cognitive, emotional, social and societal dimensions: 'the concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner'. The rationale for this research project is therefore informed by a desire to explore transformative learning theory from a more unified perspective.

The non-traditional learner

Throughout my career as an adult educator I have worked predominantly with female learners, however since becoming Childhood Practice Programme Leader at UHI in 2008 I have worked solely with non-traditional female learners. Defining a non-traditional learner can be problematic as it is subject to different interpretations. In the 1980s, a non-traditional learner could be conceptualised using the terms 'adult' or 'mature'. Non-traditional learners have often been out of formal education for several years and enter university study with alternative qualifications. Merrill (1996:10) refers to her misgivings about the term non-traditional learner, noting that it implies they are different to other learners in a

negative sense. More recently the term non-traditional referred to learners 'from backgrounds normally under-represented in universities: minority communities and/or working class families, migrant populations and disabled groups' (West *et al* 2013:120). For the purposes of this research project I have defined non-traditional learners as being over twenty-one with a vocational training and work experience background. The majority of learners undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI can be defined as non-traditional and therefore represent the norm within this subject area. A non-traditional learner will, from now on, be referred to as a learner.

UHI is currently witnessing a growing number of learners undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree. As noted previously all childhood practice professionals with leadership and supervisory responsibilities are now legally required to be qualified, or working towards, Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (2010) Level 9 (Ordinary degree level) to be eligible to register with the professional body Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The Scottish Government's commitment to widening participation promotes the movement of learners from FE to HE. This movement is supported and facilitated by the SCQF (2010) which offers an opportunity to use credit transfer as a means to develop individual progression routes and therefore contribute to the growth in numbers of adult learners participating in HE. All learners undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI made use of the SCQF to gain credit for their vocational qualifications which enabled them to gain entry to the degree.

Historically, the childhood practice workforce has been under-valued, often being viewed as 'women's work' (Moss 2003): an easy job that could be done by anyone. Dalli (2001) argues that there is a traditional alignment of work with children with the role of mothering and that this acts to disempower the childhood practice sector from claiming professional status. The development of degree level training, in particular

the Childhood Practice Degree, offers the childhood practice sector an opportunity to improve career prospects, earning potential and gaining recognition as a degree-led profession. The childhood practice sector is still battling to establish a professional identity. This is in part due to the sector being undervalued by the wider society (Kersley 2010) and also the confusion caused by the multiplicity of titles and variety of pay and conditions within the childhood practice sector which creates uncertainty as to what the various titles, roles and responsibilities mean (McGillivray 2008). The Childhood Practice Degree will help establish a professional identity.

Learners studying a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI bring with them a complex range of social, economic and cultural issues which have been traditionally under-represented in HE. They can often find themselves addressing internal barriers such as 'fear of failure or a lack of self-confidence regarding their ability to succeed in educational settings' (Furst-Bowe and Dittman 2001: 405). For a significant number of learners the biggest obstacle may be within themselves (Weatherly 2007). However, only focusing on internal obstacles and the relationship between the educator and adult learner is no longer sufficient. There is the need to re-engage with the relational aspect of learning as this aspect has the potential to create opportunities whereby learners can find 'space for play and experiment unselfconsciously' (West *et al* 2013:132). There is also a need to be mindful of the broader social and political dynamics and the implications these have for learning and teaching practices in HE.

Prior to joining the Childhood Practice Degree all prospective students will have successfully completed a vocational qualification. Although vocational qualifications are accredited in line with the SCQF (2010), the structure, content and assessment process differs from degree level study. Vocational qualifications focus more on practice whereas universities are more interested in a critique of practice based on

wider reading, discussion and a theoretical perspective (Thomson and Menmuir 2011). As a result a number of learners undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree can struggle with the demands that this level of study requires. At UHI, learners are attached to a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) whose primary role is to offer academic and pastoral support. The role of the PAT is viewed as key in encouraging their group of learners in developing their confidence, self-esteem and engagement with the broader university learning community. An online longitudinal induction programme offered as part of the Childhood Practice Degree also assists learners in becoming engaged with their studies, and can ease the transition process thereby encouraging positive learning experiences.

A significant number of learners undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI were the first members of their family to complete a degree. Many never envisaged themselves capable of university level study having had negative experiences in school as a teenager, which coloured their view of education generally and more specifically the teaching profession. Some had been encouraged by their secondary school guidance teacher to enter the childhood practice profession, being viewed as an easy option for those who found academic studies challenging, thereby acting to de-value the profession. For a few it was only once they commenced their studies at UHI that their difficulties with spelling, reading and writing, which they experienced throughout their schooling, were publicly recognised and diagnosed as dyslexia. I remember one learner noted that her difficulties had been ignored throughout her schooling, she was labelled as 'thick' and spent most of her secondary schooling being asked to sit at the back of the classroom or removed from the classroom to sit in the hallway on some occasions. Another learner remembered being asked to sit at the back of the classroom facing away from her fellow classmates.

To gain entry to the Childhood Practice Degree prospective students are required to be employed in, or have access to, a relevant setting; many are experienced managers/lead practitioners or aspire to be so in the future. The Childhood Practice Degree is studied on a part-time basis; on average completion of the degree takes three to five years. Entry to the Degree is also based on having at least two years post qualifying experience as a qualified childhood practice practitioner. When the Childhood Practice Degree was initially introduced the decision to undertake the degree was based on changing legislation rather than personal choice. This had an impact on the overall ethos of the degree programme. A significant number felt disillusioned with the changes which they viewed as being imposed by the Scottish Government. Their future plans did not involve undertaking a degree and they had no desire to do so, having already completed a previously accepted qualification. As a result they were reluctant to engage with the learning process, at times even resisting and fighting against the process. However, as the number of students personally choosing to complete the degree has increased the overall culture and ethos of the programme has altered. Degree level study still presents challenges but students appear more motivated and committed to their studies, more engaged with the learning process and, as a result, more open to the potential changes that can arise as a result of undertaking study. These potential changes were of interest to this research project.

Over the years I have accumulated a wealth of anecdotal evidence which highlights the changes learners experience as a result of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI: improved confidence and self-esteem, increased levels of motivation, deeper levels of self-understanding and improved relationships with friends and family members. One learner noted that her relationship with her teenage children and husband had improved as a result of her undertaking study; she had become more open, reflective and willing to listen. During their studies

learners began to develop a more defined professional identity and were committed to raising the profile of the childhood practice sector once they graduated. Several applied for promotion stating that their improved levels of confidence and self-esteem had given them the personal belief that they were capable of 'more'. One learner noted that the experience of studying gave her the courage to start driving again and she subsequently passed her driving test as a result. Some made the difficult decision to leave the childhood practice sector. By completing the degree many felt they would receive more recognition employed in a new field more widely acknowledged as a profession by society, for example primary teaching or adult education. Over the past year, Inverness College UHI has employed two Childhood Practice graduates and at least another two have been employed as lecturers in other FE colleges.

Based on the anecdotal evidence I collected there was a growing sense that completing a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI had the potential to evoke personal change. In gaining confidence, a deeper level of self-understanding, and establishing their professional identity, Childhood Practice graduates were in a position to challenge current societal perceptions of the childhood professional, thereby gaining social recognition as a degree-led profession. While undertaking degree level study had the potential to change lives the fragility of these changes should not be underestimated. For a number of learners, their studies marked the end of their marriage or separation from partners/family. Others struggled to integrate into life after study which led to feelings of dissatisfaction, disillusionment and a sense of being cheated. Having worked so hard towards achieving a degree and once successfully completed their lives remained unchanged and they received little social recognition. A number of graduates experienced confusion and were unsettled. The changes evoked as a result of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree were often viewed as a source of tension, as graduates tried to establish

'life after study'. This is supported by Field (2006:2) who notes that learners' experience of education can be viewed as 'both a resource for individuals seeking to promote their employability and mobility, and at the same time a cause of further uncertainty and risk'.

The anecdotal evidence showed that learners faced a number of transitions as they embarked upon, undertook and successfully completed a Childhood Practice Degree. During these transitions, learners faced emotional challenges as connections emerged between their past, present and potential future lives. They experienced a growing sense of agency and a determination to pass the degree. Field (2006:1) refers to learners having to 'manage their social capital in light of learning experiences and aspirations'. During their studies, learners' social networks expanded as they entered the world of collegiate learning and developed relationships with fellow students and tutors. While the outcome of widening social networks could have a positive impact on learners' lives there was also the potential that already established networks could be affected which could ultimately have a detrimental impact. As Field (2011:19) suggests, learners' relationships with 'close kinship and neighbourhood connections' may be disrupted which could lead to forms of social support being removed. Brookfield's (1994) notion of cultural suicide refers to the potential risk of learners alienating themselves from social networks that gave them their sense of identity. Successfully managing the transitions faced before, during and after the learning process requires courage and commitment. In my role as Childhood Practice Programme Leader I am continually inspired by learners' determination to succeed.

The online context

UHI is the only university based in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and was originally called UHI Millennium Institute. In 2008 it was awarded teaching Degree Award Powers (tDAP) and in 2011 it was awarded full university status by the Privy Council at which point it was renamed University of Highlands and Islands. Prior to 2008 degrees were authenticated by the OU Validating Service, the University of Strathclyde and the University of Aberdeen. UHI is described as a collegiate organisation because it is based on a partnership of thirteen FE colleges, research institutions and a network of more than seventy learning centres spread across Scotland. Currently there are over 7,500 students studying undergraduate and post-graduate courses. The uniqueness of UHI originates from the size of the partnership and the absence of an HE partner. As Programme Leader I am responsible for 'managing' and co-ordinating twelve staff and over 200 students across eight FE colleges.

As a partnership of FE Colleges, research institutes and learning centres UHI offers flexibility in how, where and when learners study to allow for family and work commitments. As part of an advanced high-speed electronic network, UHI offers many degree programmes which are totally online, viewing this as being more cost effective and convenient, than traditional education environments (Richardson and Swan 2003). Online study also addresses barriers to participation caused by geography or poor transport infrastructure and means learners can access accredited degree programmes from home, work or on the move. This approach appeals to learners who already juggle multiple roles as outlined in the previous section. The online context offers learners a sense of relative anonymity which they may also find appealing. As noted by Pallof and Pratt (2007) online study is a great equalizer and has the potential to free up learners to interact in ways they may have

felt uncomfortable with in a face-to-face situation. The online context may also encourage the development of relationships which are more 'pure' than those developed in a face-to-face context as learners are not distracted by physical appearance, age, clothes or any other cues by which individuals judge other people (Cranton 2005:101). These pure relationships have the potential to lead to what Dun (2012:324) refers to as a 'mind-to-mind meeting' which is free from distracting visual cues and embarrassing scrutiny.

The Childhood Practice Degree offered at UHI is delivered totally online utilising black board (BB) as the virtual learning environment (VLE). The online approach adopted is referred to as 'supported online learning'. Supported online learning is centred on a design of active and collaborative learning experiences utilising BB as a virtual classroom. As a VLE, BB offers learners a wide variety of creative and interactive pedagogic approaches such as asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous chat rooms, electronic whiteboards, videos, learning resources incorporating sound and images, internet resources and communication tools. The Childhood Practice team utilises several of the interactive online tools in their modules, in particular the asynchronous discussion boards and synchronous chat rooms. Contact with learners is also maintained through email, videos and regular announcements posted in the VLE. Face-to-face support may be offered by the PAT if learners live within the local community. Although students tend to enrol at the local UHI FE partner college, a significant number do not live locally and therefore face-to-face contact is not possible. In these circumstances PATs make good use of email, telephone and video sessions using skype or the collaborate tool within BB which uses the same technology as skype.

At UHI the online learning community can be viewed 'as what people do together, rather than where or through what means they do them' (Rovai 2002:4). Of interest

to this research project are the online interactions among learners themselves, the interactions between the educator and learners and the potential collaboration in learning that results from these interactions. There are two components that distinguish an online learning community from an online community: 'engaging in collaborative learning and the reflective practice involved in transformative learning' (Palloff and Pratt 2005:1). Palloff and Pratt (2007) refer to the process of online collaborative learning as electronic pedagogy. Electronic pedagogy is not about new age software packages but is rather concerned with fostering the skills involved with community building among a group of learners so as to maximise the benefits and potential that the online context holds in the educational arena (*ibid*). The people-ware, that is, the learners and educators, rather than the software is of value. The development of an online learning community has the potential to shape the process of transformative learning. The rationale of this research project is therefore informed by a desire to explore the online interactions noted above and the potential of the online context as a space capable of fostering transformative learning.

Research questions

The three aspects outlined in this chapter have informed the rationale for this research project and have led to the following set of research questions:

Key research question:

- What is the nature of transformative learning in an online educational context?

This question relates to my interest in exploring the experience of transformative learning online from a unified perspective which includes cognitive, emotional and social dimensions.

The following sub-questions:

- How is transformative learning constructed by learners one year after the completion of their online studies?

Learners may not be aware of their own transformations therefore I may interpret their experiences based on my constructs and not theirs.

- What qualities of an online relationship are significant in creating the conditions for fostering transformative learning?

I would like to explore if there are particular aspects which characterise relationships in an online transformative context.

- In what ways can an online learning community be established which has the potential to foster transformative learning?

This question refers to connections learners establish in an online context which may, or may not, promote transformative learning.

Establishing the research boundaries

This research project presented an opportunity to explore the experience of transformative learning in an online context from a theoretical as well as an empirical perspective. As Cranton and Hoggan (2012) and Smith (2012) note, research and writing on transformative learning online is minimal. My research project therefore attempts in some way to help to address this. While acknowledging the existence of other learning theories, an exploration of these perspectives would have distracted from my primary interest. There were also time and word count restrictions to consider. There were other avenues I could have taken in this research project. I initially considered examining ways in which gender influenced the experience of transformative learning but as all my participants were women I

would have faced challenges in trying to identify influential factors with no data to make a comparison with. As UHI is based in the Highlands and Islands the impact of rurality was another avenue I could have explored. However, the flexibility of studying online means UHI attracts students from across Scotland and therefore a significant number of learners are not situated in what would be defined as a rural location. The decision to study online at UHI is more often driven by factors related to flexibility rather than learners being unable to physically attend a college due to where they live. There was also the potential to explore ways in which social class affected the experience of transformative learning but again time and space prevented this. Establishing my research boundaries acted to guide the research process and maintained focus.

Subsequent chapters

Having provided an introductory overview of my research rationale, and outlined my research questions, Chapter Two presents a review of the literature that informed and shaped my emerging thinking with regard to transformative learning theory and the educational practice of fostering transformative learning online. Chapter Three explores the methodological influences, research methods, and ethical considerations. In Chapter Four I discuss how I collected and analysed the data from a theoretical and procedural perspective. Chapter Five presents the research findings based on the themes that emerged from the process of data analysis. In Chapter Six I address the research questions through an examination of central issues that emerged from analysing the data. Chapter Seven offers a conclusion. In presenting a summary I revisit the research questions, outline ways in which my research has contributed to knowledge and its relevance to educational practice, discuss the limits of my research project, identify areas for further research and conclude noting my personal reflections.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Introduction

The process of transformative learning touches on and reminds us of the fundamental mystery that is being human. As educators we hold for a time the small, delicate creature in the palm of our hands....that process of holding represents a complex and challenging activity. We have only just begun to understand what it takes in online environments (Dirkx and Smith 2009:65).

Making links with the rationale for this research project the aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, a review of transformative learning is presented. While acknowledging Mezirow as the founder of transformative learning theory his focus on rationality acts to limit the construction of transformative learning. Therefore an exploration of alternative perspectives which builds on Mezirow's original theory will be provided which presents a more unified view. A unified perspective recognises the significance of alternative ways of knowing and embraces the emotional and social dimensions of transformative learning. Secondly, an exploration of the online learning context as a potential space for fostering transformative learning will be presented, focusing specifically on the aspects that create the conditions for fostering transformative learning online. Research and writing on fostering transformative learning online is minimal (Cranton, Hoggan 2012 and Smith 2012), therefore it was necessary to draw on literature related to fostering learning online which is more prolific.

Transformative learning

Since it was first introduced to the field of adult education by Mezirow (1978) the concept of transformative learning has been an enduring topic of research and theory. As a theory it has been viewed as a complex idea that presents considerable

practical and ethical challenges (Dirkx 1998). The popularity of transformative learning has to some extent been its downfall. The overuse of the phrase transformation to refer to a myriad of learning experiences has led to what Illeris (2104b:3) refers to as 'conceptual uncertainty'. This is further supported by Hoggan (2014:9) who states that transformative learning theory 'is suffering from evacuation'. Newman (2012:51) somewhat provocatively argued 'that we strike transformative learning from the educational lexicon altogether'. I disagree with this view, however to ensure transformative learning is not banished from the field of adult education, it is necessary to work towards clearly defining its distinct characteristics. There is a need to move beyond Mezirow's original work and in doing so recognise that it is possible to draw on a number of perspectives which have emerged in response to the critiques of his work. These differing views can be brought together to form a more unified theory. In this section I track the development of transformative learning theory from its roots to a more current unified perspective.

Transformative learning: its roots

Influenced by Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization and Illich's (1970) calls for cultural revolution Mezirow embarked on an ambitious study of womens' experiences of college re-entry programmes. His original findings highlighted the importance of adult education and its potential to help learners acquire 'a new sense of identity....which can lead to greater autonomy, control and responsibility for their own lives' (Mezirow 1978:102). This led Mezirow to develop the theory of perspective transformation; that is, a structural reorganisation in the way that learners look at themselves and their relationships. A structural reorganisation may take place gradually over a period of time or may be more epochal due to a significant event such as death, illness, having children or being made redundant.

In 1985 Mezirow defined a structural reorganisation as a transformed meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives or what Mezirow (2000) later refers to as habits of mind, are the structure of assumptions which determine learners' frames of reference. Learners' frames of reference, or points of view, are composed of sets of assumptions and expectations based on learners' values, beliefs, attitudes and feelings. Mezirow (1985) refers to learners' sets of assumptions as clusters of meaning schemes. These sets of assumptions and expectations influence the way learners interpret experiences but, as Marsick and Mezirow note (2002), often act to distort the way they think, feel, decide and act. With reference to these concepts transformative learning challenges learners' points of view, leading them to revise their habits of mind through the process of critical reflection and rational discourse.

Mezirow's original research proposed that the process of transformative learning involved ten phases as outlined in Table 2.1, although not all ten phases are required to experience a transformation. Glisczinski (2007) refers to the phases disorientating dilemma, critical reflection and rational discourse as the benchmarks of transformative learning. This is supported by Brock (2010) who, based on her research measuring the incidence of transformative learning and the importance of the ten phases, found that the highest incidence of reporting transformative learning reported by 256 undergraduates was connected with the phase of critical reflection, followed by phases of disorientating dilemmas and trying on new roles. Embedded within the ten phases Mezirow (1991 and 2000) outlines four levels of learning (see Figure 2.1): an elaboration of existing frames of reference or points of view, learning new frames of reference or points of view, transforming points of view or meaning schemes and transforming habits of mind or meaning perspectives. The fourth level

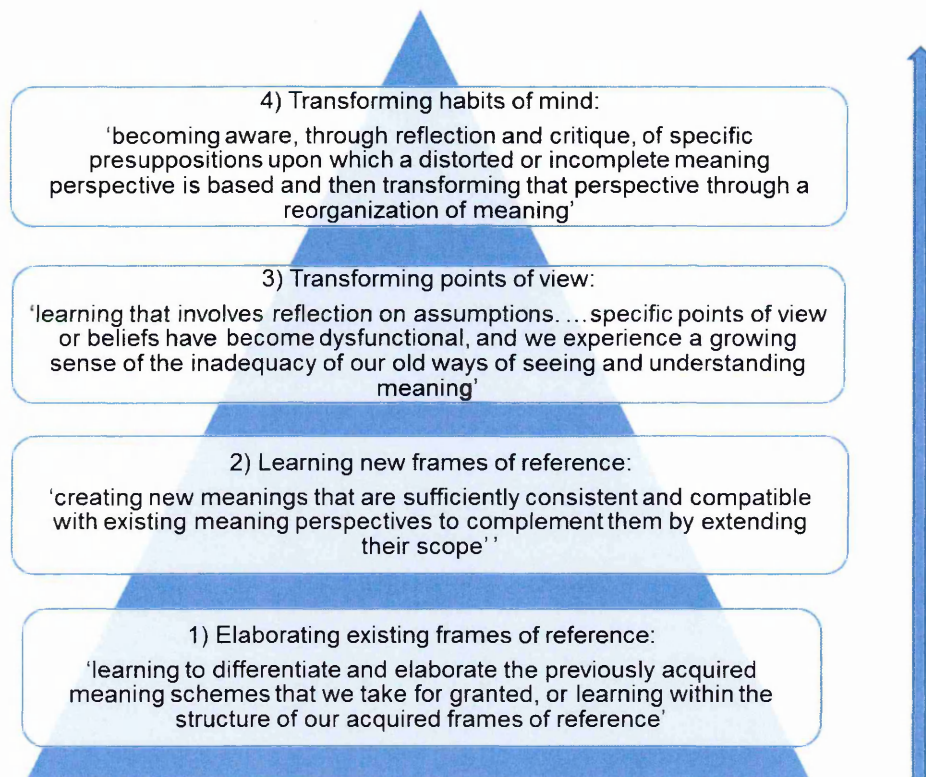
Table 2.1: Mezirow’s (1978) Ten phases of transformative learning

Phase 1	A disorientating dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
Phase 6	Planning a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying on new roles
Phase 9	Building of complete and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective

indicates that a learner has experienced a profound transformation. An accreditation of transformed points of view or meaning schemes (phase 3 in Figure 2.1) can lead to a transformed habit of mind or meaning perspective. Although it is possible for learners to try on a new role by trying on another’s point of view Mezirow (2000) notes that it is not possible for learners to try on another learner’s habit of mind.

Learners’ habits of mind are sets of assumptions which have been influenced by what Mezirow (2000:16) refers to as ‘cultural paradigms’; that is, learning that has been unintentionally absorbed from learners’ culture, family and biography. Mezirow (p17) identifies a variety of habits of mind that act as filters through

Figure 2.1: Mezirow's (1991:93 and 94) Four levels of learning

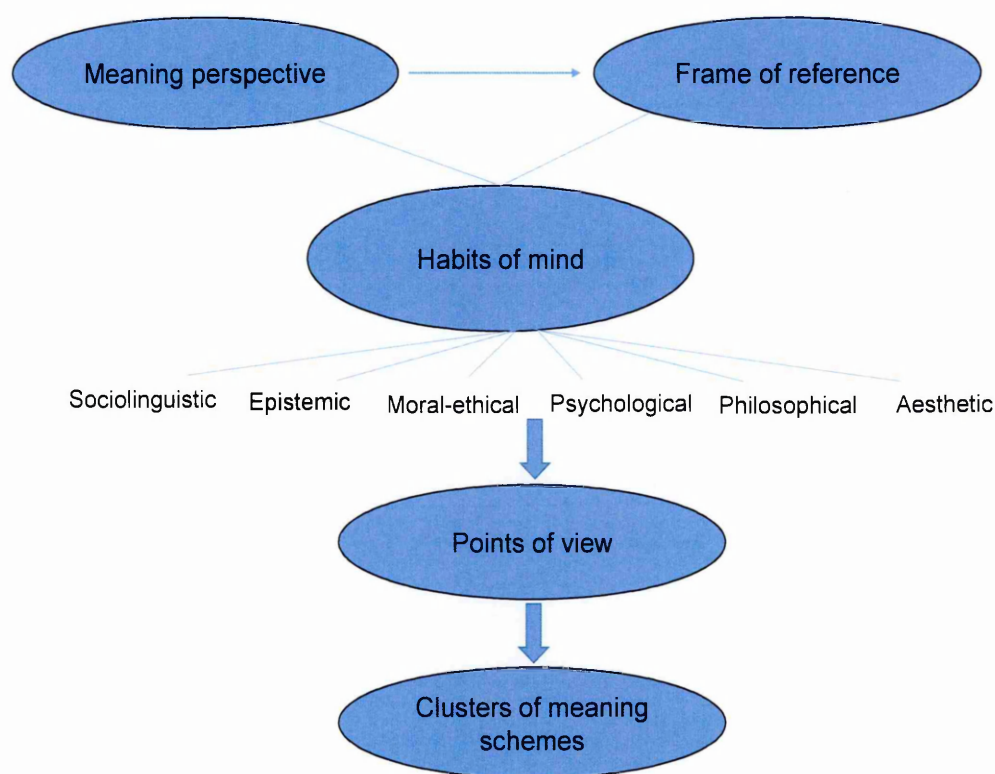


which learners interpret the meaning of experiences: sociolinguistic (related to language and how it is used in a social setting), moral-ethical (relates to learners' conscience and morality), epistemic (related to knowledge and how learners use knowledge), philosophical (related to learners' worldview or religious doctrine), psychological (related to how learners view themselves) and aesthetic (related to learners' view of beauty, their tastes, values and attitudes).

Figure 2.2 presents an overview of the concepts that form part of transformative learning theory. Learners' meaning perspectives determine their frames of reference. Together these form part of learners' habits of mind. There are potentially six habits of mind. Learners express their habits of mind as points of view and these points of view are comprised of clusters of meaning schemes. Mezirow (2000:18) advocates that learners' habits of mind offers them 'a sense of stability, coherence, community and identity'. Learners will automatically uphold their habit of mind unless they are faced with a disorientating dilemma which places

them in a position whereby they are encouraged to consider an alternative perspective. As Mezirow claims, transformative learning challenges learners' habits of mind and has the potential to make them more inclusive, open, discriminating, reflective and emotionally open to change.

Figure 2.2: Concepts that form part of transformative learning: an overview



The experience of transformative learning is grounded in the nature of communication. Mezirow (1991) utilises Habermas' (1987) concept of communicative action to explain more accurately the process of transformative learning and the significance of the sociolinguistic context, which creates the conditions necessary to engage in critical reflection and, in particular, rational discourse. Rational discourse differs from everyday dialogue. When learners engage in rational discourse the act of communication becomes more independent, less restricted by social structures and relationships. It leads learners to question the comprehensibility, validity, truth and authenticity of what is being communicated,

and the credibility of the person with whom they are engaged in rational discourse. Forward movement becomes restricted until these questions are resolved through the process of continued rational discourse and critical reflection. Mezirow (1985) claims that the very act of taking part in rational discourse, free of coercion, promotes the process of self-directed learning and therefore has the potential to foster a transformation. Mezirow (1991:77/78) outlines the ideal conditions for rational discourse:

- have accurate and complete information
- be free from coercion and distorting self-deception
- be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively
- be open to alternative perspectives
- be able to become critically reflective upon presuppositions and their consequences
- have equal opportunity to participate, challenge, question, refute and reflect and to hear others and
- be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity.

Engaging in rational discourse under these ideal conditions encourages learners to become critically reflective of their habits of mind. Mezirow (2000:15) notes that the ability to fully participate in rational discourse is dependent on the following elements: 'maturity, education, safety, health, economic security and emotional intelligence'. In my view these elements may inhibit learners from engaging in rational discourse thereby diminishing the potential for them to experience a transformation. This view is explored in more detail under my discussion of rational discourse.

Once transformed, there is no returning to a previous habit of mind but continuous forward movement is a rare occurrence. Mezirow (2000) claims that learners may experience stalling, particularly during the initial phases of transformation or towards the end when learners are faced with committing to change or deciding to maintain 'status quo' without undertaking reasoned reflection. Learners may also dismiss another point of view on the basis of it being viewed as distorting, deceptive, ill-informed or crazy. Featherstone and Kelly (2007:270) define dismissing a point of view based on these factors as 'negative resistance'.

There are challenges in achieving the final phase of transformation. In their research on the transformative learning potential of shifting from a traditional to critical pedagogy, Featherstone and Kelly (2007) found that while learners displayed tentative openings to new ways of seeing and being these could be quickly reversed or undone. Making links with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*, Featherstone and Kelly (2007:281) suggest learners' experiences of transformative learning were best understood as 'messy objective/subjective, personal/social bringing into awareness of *habitus* around that core self'. Although learners experienced attitudinal changes, a greater openness in some assumptions and perspectives, greater engagement and empowerment, they did so holding on to a sense of core self that remained stable throughout and therefore these changes were not viewed as transformative. In contrast, King's (2004) research on adult educators undertaking a graduate course found thirty-six of the fifty-eight participants experienced perspective transformation. King (2004:162) refers to participants feeling dramatically more open-minded, looking at things from multiple perspectives and reassessing social expectations noting that 'these were not minor changes, but instead deeply felt experiences of new ways of understanding their worlds'.

Transformative learning: working towards a unified perspective

As stated in Chapter 1 page 4, Cranton and Taylor (2012) encourage a move towards a more unified theory of transformative learning. In this section I explore alternative perspectives which build on Mezirow's theory and present a more unified view. Newman (1994:104) indicated that transformative learning is 'centred on the individual learner'. However, Mezirow (1997) never intended to dichotomize the individual and society noting that this would be counter-productive in trying to fully comprehend the learning process. This is supported by Cranton and Roy (2003) who claim that individual and social goals both have a place in transformative learning theory. Illeris (2014a:32) criticises Mezirow's definition of transformative learning as being 'too narrow and too much related to cognitive learning'. Although Mezirow acknowledges a more affective view of transformative learning proposed by Dirkx (2006b), one that reflects the emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions, he remains committed to the view that transformative learning is 'a rational process involving critical reflection of epistemic assumptions as a basis for transforming a frame of reference' (Mezirow 2006:134). Mezirow does however concede that any meaningful theory of transformative learning should include both dimensions of the learning process (rational and affective). I would argue that this offers a more satisfying perspective and is more in line with Dirkx (2006b) who claims that a balanced view of transformative learning incorporates both dimensions and therefore ultimately seeks to integrate both the affective and rational dimensions of the mind.

Not wanting to limit the scope of transformative learning, Hoggan (2014:14) offers a broad definition: learning is considered transformative when there is a 'dramatic change in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes and interacts with the world'. Hoggan (2014:14) outlines a number of transformative components: self,

assumptions, ways of knowing and/or thinking, ways of being, behaviour and capacity. He derived these components based on an analysis of all articles related to transformative learning published in the Journal of Transformative Education from 2011-2013. His focus was on ways the articles defined or implied transformative outcomes. Making use of these transformative components, a typology of transformative outcomes is presented which encourages scholars to clarify the impact of each component from the following perspectives: how a learner changed and/or evidence of deep impact and evidence of impact on a learner's multiple life contexts (Hoggan 2014). Illeris (2014a/b) proposes an alternative definition stating that transformative learning is all learning that signifies a change in the identity of a learner. Initially Illeris (2011:635) understood transformative learning 'as any learning which implies a change involving elements of a learner's self'. However, focusing on self-acts to individualise transformative learning and as West (2014a:166) notes, neglects 'ideology and power in shaping and constraining' learners. Utilising the concept of identity to define transformative learning includes both the self and the personality, how one experiences one's self and how one is experienced by others. There is a connection between the internal and external experience (Illeris 2014a/b). Therefore one's identity consists of an individual biographical identity as well as a societal identity (Illeris 2007). While distinctive in their interpretation, I believe that both definitions share a common core; that is, they acknowledge the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of transformative learning which act to move beyond Mezirow's commitment to cognitive rationality.

Viewing transformative learning through multiple theoretical dimensions is not new. In 1998 Dirkx identified four scholars whose distinct theoretical perspectives could be utilised to establish a more informed view of transformative learning: Freire's (1970) social emancipatory approach to education, Mezirow's (1978 and 1991)

cognitive rational approach, Daloz's (1986) structural developmental approach and Boyd's (1991) depth psychology approach. More recently, Cranton and Taylor (2012:3) identified three theoretical dimensions of transformative learning: cognitive or rational, beyond rational or extra-rational and emancipatory or social critique, and noted that these were likely to be 'the result of scholars examining different facets of the same thing'. While the process of transformative learning may vary due to the circumstances, context and those involved, Cranton and Taylor (2012) claim that the outcome for all is similar: acting differently, having a deeper self-awareness, having more open perspectives, and experiencing a deep shift in worldview. Although Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning suggests a linear path, Cranton (2002) proposes a spiral framework, one in which learners may repeatedly encounter the same phase as they progress up the transformative spiral. Based on the work of Glisczinski (2007) and Brock (2010) (see page 18) I suggest that the significant phases of this transformative spiral are disorientating dilemma, critical reflection and rational discourse. In presenting a unified perspective of transformative learning these significant phases frame what follows.

Disorientating dilemma

When learners encounter an alternative perspective that challenges their habits of mind they encounter a disorientating dilemma. Daloz (2012) notes that transformations rarely, if ever, come about abruptly but rather, they slip into place piece by piece until they suddenly become visible, often to others first. According to Brookfield (2000), for it to be considered transformative learning, the disorientating dilemma must trigger a massive structural change. In contrast, Dirkx (1998:11) recognises the significance of everyday occurrences and their potential to foster transformative learning, noting that 'transformative learning has neither a

distinct beginning nor an ending.....a potential that is eternally present within ourselves as learners’.

The ability to ‘lean’ into a disorientating dilemma is influenced by what Mezirow (1998:189) refers to as non-cognitive factors: ‘the disposition and emotional stamina to believe that one has both the will and the way’ to experience a transformation. Interestingly, this view appears to recognise an affective dimension which contradicts Mezirow’s commitment to rationality. By functionalising Mezirow’s four levels of learning, Whitelaw et al (2004) found only two of the nine participants, who took part in their research, experienced transformed habits of mind. They claimed that several participants had instrumental expectations regarding what they would learn and were therefore less open to experiencing a disorientating dilemma. In creating a space in which learners feel safe or are willing to openly embrace a disorientating dilemma requires adult educators to pay attention to the emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning which, in my view, are not explicitly explored in Mezirow’s writings. This view is supported by Taylor (2001) who notes the affective and rational dimensions of transformative learning need to be placed on an equal footing, thereby recognising their interdependent relationship. If there is no intrinsic buy-in, learners are less likely to engage with the non-cognitive factors. As a result they will be less willing to ‘lean’ into a disorientating dilemma and therefore less likely to experience a transformed habit of mind, or as proposed by Kasl and Yorks (2002:8), a transformed ‘habit of being’. The concept ‘habit of being’ offers a more meaningful view as it acknowledges multiple ways of knowing which I feel more accurately reflects learners’ experience of transformative learning.

Kasworm (2008:27) refers to ‘the courage and fragility’ of learners and explores the four key emotional challenges that learners face in developing a successful student identity: entering college to succeed, continuing in college through renegotiation or

adaptation, becoming one in the world of collegiate learning and considering future possibilities. As learners encounter these emotional challenges there is an interplay between their past and present lives, as well as a growing sense of agency, coupled with the determination to succeed. Links can be made here with Bourdieu's (1990:108) concepts of habitus and capital and his analogy of a 'fish in or out of water'. Learners may struggle to find their place in the institutional habitus of higher education as they do not embody the required cultural and social capital that are valued by academics and other students (Reay *et al* 2005). Of interest to this research project were the ways in which learners experienced disorientations and possibilities of altered habits of being within the transitional space of higher education. In other words, how they became a 'fish in water' within a higher education institute.

Becoming a 'fish in water' can be viewed as a fragile and at times painful experience. As learners embrace a disorientating experience they may face resistance and avoid change. In her research on learners' growing edge of thinking and sense making Berger (2004:338) noted that some learners found the disorientating experience exciting and energizing while others found the experience unpleasant and frightening. The growing edge of knowing can be referred to as a 'liminal space', one in which learners come to terms with the limitations of their knowing and begin to expand these limits (*ibid*). As learners enter a liminal space they are faced with the unknown which presents an opportunity to move their current knowledge into a new place. However there is often a source of tension between the known and unknown which can be troubling for learners. Learners may experience anxiety or feel threatened by the unknown and therefore resist change. Malkki (2010:49) suggests that learners experience 'edge emotions' within the liminal space which takes them out of their 'comfort zone'. In their comfort zone learners' current

knowledge is not challenged and, as a result, no unpleasant emotions are experienced. Edge emotions refer to the unpleasant emotions learners experience when they are unable to use their current knowledge to understand what is happening within their environment or within themselves; they are pushed out of their comfort zone. Embracing and working with these edge emotions is not a natural state and therefore learners are predisposed to maintain or return to their comfort zone which diminishes the potential to experience a transformation. Although Mezirow (1998) refers to non-cognitive factors, I feel his commitment to rationality does not adequately address the emotional challenges learners face within these liminal spaces.

As learners experience a disorientation their 'old' habits of being become unstable and rather than openly embracing the change, Malkii and Green (2014:11) propose that learners arrive at '*a loss point of orientation*'. To resume stability learners can unquestionably hold on to their 'old' habits of being or 'take hold' of the change and embrace the edge emotions which have the potential to transform them. According to Mezirow (1990), the process of critical reflection enables learners to navigate their way through '*a loss point of orientation*'. During this process learners reassess their meaning structures (habits of mind) or false interpretations, focusing on the why, the reasons for, and consequences of, their actions which may ultimately lead to a transformation. However, there is an emotional dimension to this process which Mezirow does not fully acknowledge (Malkii 2010).

Critical reflection

Critical reflection begins with learners asking 'Why?' which promotes conditions for fostering transformative learning. Learners may also engage in content or process reflection. Content reflection involves learners exploring the description of a problem and focuses their attention on 'What?'. During process reflection learners

check their problem solving strategies and therefore their focus is on 'How?'. Content and process reflection may lead to a transformed point of view (level 3 on Figure 2.1 page 18) and the continued accumulation of content and process reflection may ultimately lead to a transformed habit of mind but only critical reflection has the potential on its own to transform learners' habits of mind (level 4 on Figure 2.1 page 18).

Brookfield (2000, 2009 and 2012) draws on critical social theory particularly that of ideology critique which, he notes, is central to the process of critical reflection. For reflection to be considered critical, learners should engage in some form of power analysis of the situation or context which according to Brookfield (2000:126), involves them identifying 'assumptions they hold dear that are actually destroying their sense of well-being and serving the interests of others'. Critical reflection therefore becomes a political concept. Engaging in critical reflection as an ideology critique enables learners to uncover dominant ideas and practices that justify and maintain economic and political inequity. In order to uncover these dominant ideologies learners must become aware of how they live within them and work against them to benefit others. Critical reflection as an ideology critique offers an insight into how learners may develop a whole new way of being, 'a way of thinking, acting, feeling and creating', that moves from instrumental learning to creative fulfilment in collaboration with others (Brookfield 2012:144). While I have found it challenging to fully embrace the politicised nature of Brookfield's work I have grown to appreciate its significance to my research project.

In her research on reflection, Kreber (2005) found that critical reflection was least common among participants. The more experienced participants did engage with the process of critical reflection related to certain forms of teaching knowledge, which suggests that motivation may have played a role in fostering this level of

reflection. In their research using stimulated recall interviews, Liimatainen *et al* (2001) found that half of the sixteen participants achieved critical reflection, noting the developmental nature of reflection may potentially have an impact on participants' ability to engage with the process. I propose the ability or willingness to engage with critical reflection should not be viewed as a given, but rather depends upon a number of interrelated factors such as learners' disposition, level of maturity, emotional intelligence, culture and environmental context.

Affective learning plays a significant role in promoting critical reflection, a view which is not adequately addressed by Mezriow. This is supported by Taylor (2001) who suggests that Mezriow's commitment to rationality is out of balance and, as a result, claims that there is a need to pay more attention to the role that emotions and non-conscious ways of knowing play in transformative learning. While acknowledging the process of reflection as central to transformative learning, Dirkx (2010) does not view this process as 'critical' but rather reflection involves learners engaging in creativity, sitting back and observing. According to Dirkx (1997) transformative learning can be viewed as inner work. Learners' inner world is personal and relates to their private lives and personal dimensions of their being (Dirkx 2006a). It is suggested by Dirkx (2001) that in pursuit of intellectual and cognitive growth, learners may become more aware of their inner world: that is, the imaginative and emotional dimensions of their being. As they tune into their inner world, making links with the outer world, they become more aware of the powerful forces and dynamics at work in their lives (Dirkx 2006a). This view is further supported by Kovan and Dirkx (2003) who note that transformative learning is a process of deep learning that is intimately entwined with, and embedded in, the historical, developmental and social context of learners' lives. The process is often gradual and takes place over a prolonged period of time; a slow realisation of a change which is long in coming and prepared for throughout learners' lives (Daloz 2000).

The experience of transformative learning as defined by Dirkx (2014:4) involves learners 'learning to struggle with difference, of facing and embracing' their 'shadows, of realizing purpose in' their 'pain, and learning to work within a deep sense of unknown'. This is the broader landscape of transformative learning, one which becomes more colourful and alive as learners become more aware of, and work with, their inner world. I have an affinity with this view and I believe it more accurately reflects the experiences I have witnessed in my role as an adult educator over the past eighteen years.

Malkki (2010:43) notes that Mezirow's (1991 and 2000) transformative learning theory 'offers one of the most sophisticated conceptualisations of reflection' but claims that his focus on cognitive aspects at the expense of emotional and social dimensions presents a rather idealized rational process of reflection. While committed to rationality there are instances in Mezirow's writing where the significance of an affective dimension is noted although these are implied rather than explicit. He acknowledges the depth of critical reflection necessary to question the validity 'of values that have been very close to the centre of one's self-concept' (Mezirow 1990:12) and refers to transformative learning as an 'intensely threatening experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and our emotional responses to the need for change' (Mezirow 2000:6/7). However, Mezirow does not explore the connections between the cognitive and affective dimensions present during the process of reflection. It is my view that Mezirow's commitment to rationality offers, at times, a rather 'cold' clinical view of reflection; one that is explicitly devoid of emotionality and acts to functionalise the process. Jordi (2011) offers a more satisfying perspective which moves beyond reflection as a cognitive process to include imagination, emotion, memory and intuition. This view emphasises the importance of embodiment and, I would suggest, is more in line with Dirkx's work. Jordi (2001:182) does note that

the concept of reflection 'needs to be rescued and rehabilitated rather than rejected', concluding that a more balanced concept is needed which recognises the significance of both the rational and embodied processes.

Rational discourse

Mezirow (2012) claims that transformative learning involves participation in rational discourse to make use of the experience of others to validate assumptions and beliefs and take action based on the resulting insight. In fostering discourse Daloz (2000) suggests that the establishment of an ethos of safety and trust in which learners feel free to share their views truthfully is necessary. Cranton (2006a) notes that for learners to engage in discourse requires them to have an open mind, the ability to listen carefully and empathetically, seek common ground, suspend judgement and assess alternative beliefs. Engaging in discourse is not about winning arguments but rather, as Mezirow (2000:12/13) states 'involves finding agreement, welcoming difference, 'trying on' other points of view, identifying the common in the contradictory, tolerating the anxiety in paradox, searching for synthesis and reframing'. Mezirow (2000) claims that if all learners are able to participate in discourse under the ideal conditions outlined on page 22, then these conditions would become viewed as the norm. However, the use of the phrase 'ideal' implies these conditions are illusive. Indeed, Pietrykowski (1998:69) refers to these ideal conditions as 'utopian'. Mezirow (2000:14) himself acknowledges 'these ideal conditions constitute a principle; they are never fully realised in practice'. This is a rather perplexing statement. If these ideal conditions are never fully realised in practice they may therefore remain in the realm of theory or even fantasy. Further exploration of these ideal conditions is presented as Mezirow reflects on the writings of Belenky *et al* (1996) and what they refer to as really talking. 'In real talk, domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent, as are empathy

and attentive caring' (Belenky *et al* 1996:146). At the point of constructing knowledge learners would be able to relate to others despite significant differences. Empathy and attentive caring are central features in real talk as they enable learners to develop a sense of connected knowing. Connected knowing involves learners trying to understand the views of others rather than focusing on the flaws in others' reasoning. It is a personal and collaborative process whereby learners try to empathise with others and refrain from judgment (Galotti 1998). Cranton (2006a) notes that rational discourse could be replaced by what she refers to as subjective discussion. The conditions of subjective discussion are more in line with real talk and encourages connected knowing. Cranton (2006a) claims that subjective discussion facilitates dialogue in which the role of rational discourse is minimised but still has the capacity to engage all learners who are ready and willing to be engaged.

In order to fully participate in discourse it is necessary to acknowledge the potential impact that learners' culture, history and biographies have on the manner and degree to which they can fully engage. Cranton (2006a:133) raises concerns related to the exclusivity of transformative learning and notes learners' capacity to fully participate in rational discourse may be unrealistic if it remains viewed as an 'elitist endeavor'. Mezirow (2003:60) does address these concerns stating 'overcoming the threat of exclusion constitutes a significant epistemological rationale for adult educators to commit themselves to economic, cultural, and social action initiatives'. However, I remain sceptical. While in agreement with Mezirow's perspective, how this is translated in practice remains elusive and therefore confirms my concern regarding the ideal conditions for discourse only existing in the realm of theory.

In creating conditions of social democracy to facilitate discourse, Mezirow (2000:31) claims that it is necessary for adult educators to create 'protected learning environments' in which the power relationships engendered in the structure of communication are blocked out. This view is supported by Jarvis (2010) who suggests that only when learners and educators have freely chosen to forego some of their autonomy can open dialogue take place. However, in creating protected learning environments, Mezirow (2003:53) notes that educators should remain mindful that 'power and influence are endemic in our lives'. Power relations exist within every interaction and therefore cannot be overlooked. As role models for their learners, Brookfield (2009) states that educators need to carefully consider the power they have and the necessity to create conditions which do not contribute to oppression and silencing. Rather than viewing the existence of power negatively, Brookfield (2001) claims that its presence can be seen as both pleasurable and productive. Drawing on the writings of Foucault, Cranton (2006a) suggests adult educators need to learn to work with power and become conscious of the power relations that inherently exist within their practice. In doing so they 'can assist learners to recognise that they too are agents of power and have the capacity for subverting dominant power relations' (Cranton 2006a:124). This enables them to more fully participate in discourse and therefore has the potential to foster a transformation.

The online context: a space for fostering transformations

Having explored transformative learning and presented a more unified perspective I now turn my attention to the online context. As outlined in Chapter One I work within an online educational environment as do students studying a Childhood Practice Degree and also participants that took part in this research project. I therefore have an interest in investigating transformative learning online and the

potential of the online context as an educational space capable of fostering this type of learning. For clarification, learning online is being defined as:

the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience (Ally 2004:5).

Benson *et al* (2001:252) refer to learning online as the 'New Domain paradigm'. This New Domain paradigm focuses less on the physical and geographical distance between learners and educators but more on the potential interactions between learners and educators, between learners themselves and between learners and the online course content. Physical proximity therefore loses its significance; the principles are to create an online context that is convenient, flexible and accessible anytime, anywhere. As online interactions are nurtured online relationships form and online learning communities develop, and it is my view that it is these aspects that create the conditions for fostering transformative learning online and are the focus for what follows.

Online relationships

Supporting learners through transformative learning online raises questions in relation to the role of the online educator. Rather than focusing on what the educator should do for learners, Malkki and Green (2014:17) advocate that the most essential role for the educator is to 'be' with learners during their transformation. It is not about doing something for learners 'but rather a way of being, a willingness to be present....a sensitivity *not* to do but just *be*' as learners engage in a process of transformative learning (*ibid*). To 'be' with learners involves the educator displaying a willingness to be present, to accept and to support as learners encounter emotions

which they may find challenging to openly embrace. The role of the educator is not to pose solutions for learners facing dilemmas but rather guide and encourage them to take ownership of the process and work towards a potential transformation. The capacity to just 'be' as learners work through their transformation can be viewed as one of the most challenging aspects for educators committed to fostering transformative learning and 'it is infinitively more difficult in the online environment' (Dirkx and Smith 2009:65). In her research exploring how students talked about sensitive cultural topics online, Zieghan (2001) found transformative learning was promoted when the online educators were present during the entire learning process, nurturing and posing questions, setting guidelines and creating a safe space for respectful dialogue and actively promoting an empathetic approach. It was further noted that the online context, in particular the asynchronous online class environment, offered learners the 'gift of time and space' to reflect upon course material, to consider how they wanted to respond and to engage in dialogue which had the potential to encourage a deeper level of reflection (Zieghan 2001:149).

The online context offers a new role for online educators. They are no longer at the centre of the interaction or the source. Baran *et al* (2013:4) refers to this new role as the 'guide on the side'. In becoming a guide on the side, the role of online educators is to design and facilitate a learner-centred approach which offers a more distributed level of power and control. This acts to diminish hierarchy in the online context (Salmon 2011). In sharing the facilitation role, online educators offer opportunities for their learners 'to explore ways to promote peers' active participation and dialogue' (Baran and Correia 2009:359). Palloff and Pratt (2007:51) claim that this should be experienced as a 'mutually empowering act'. The online context may act as an equalizer as it offers learners a sense of relative anonymity which may free them up to share things they may not have in a face-to-face classroom.

Junn (2007) notes that the two dimensional, linear asynchronous nature of online discussions offers a less chaotic context than a face-to-face classroom which may encourage learners to more actively engage. As suggested by Maton (2012) learners may benefit from the relative anonymity the online context offers and as a result they may find it easier to establish their role in the institutional habitus of online education. During their research exploring transformative learning online Hanlin-Rowney *et al* (2006) found the online asynchronous classroom offered the opportunity for deeper, more reflective engagement than a face-to-face environment. While there were challenges in sharing the facilitation role and reliance on written communication led to misinterpretations, the group worked hard to nurture relationships and clarify meaning. If space is not created for all learners to have their voices heard, or at least be offered the opportunity, the online context will reproduce structures of inequality (Brookfield 2000) and the potential for fostering transformative learning would be diminished.

Palloff and Pratt (2007:4) define the concept of social presence 'as the ability to portray oneself as a "real" person in the online environment'. In their research examining students' perception of social presence Richardson and Swan (2003) concluded that students with high perceptions of social presence also scored high in terms of perceived learning and perceived satisfaction with the online educator. Immediacy behaviours are therefore significant in the online context but there are challenges. Online educators can no longer 'rely on sensory and expressive skills to establish and maintain relationships' with their learners (Major 2010:184). This means their affective online persona has to 'change in terms of non-verbal communication, intimacy, energy and humour' (Coppola *et al* 2002:178). Making good use of online tools, for example synchronous chat, video conference, short videos, and pod casts, can help bridge the physical and emotional gap. Cranton

(2010) proposes that the use of expressive language when communicating with learners, responding using their names, the use of humour and the inclusion of emotional reactions e.g. “I’m smiling” and “You made me laugh” also contribute to the development of meaningful connections.

As an online educator Cranton’s (2005) persona altered, in becoming more present online she found herself adopting a more challenging approach with her learners which encouraged their critical reflection. As educators bring their authentic persona into the online classroom they may find themselves questioning personal, social and institutional norms/expectations about what it means to be a ‘good’ educator and as a result have to reconsider the educational practices they adopt as online educators. If the aim is to create conditions for fostering transformative learning, online educators may need to understand better ‘their personal and hidden inner curricular’ and in doing so acquire a deeper understanding of the ‘more intimate and ostensible beliefs and motivations’ of what it means to be an online educator (Shockley *et al* 2008:198).

Offering supportive, formative feedback in a timely manner motivates learners, fosters online dialogue and encourages alternative ways of thinking (Meyers 2008 and Salmon 2011). Youngblood *et al* (2001) claim that online educators who frequently log on and facilitate dialogue will assist their learners to feel more in touch and engaged with the online learning process. The online context also has the capacity to recreate what Ryan *et al* (2000:109) refer to as ‘an electronic version of the corridor or coffee room’ in which learners can develop their thinking based on chance remarks or conversations posted online by their fellow students. The online world is by no means perfect and the lack of non-verbal cues and immediate feedback can lead to misunderstandings and frustration which can cause verbal ‘warfare’, alternatively known as ‘flaming’ (*ibid*). However, perhaps these episodes

of flaming present opportunities for online educators to foster the affective dimension of transformative learning (Dirkx and Smith 2009). This does raise ethical issues. Brookfield (2009) notes that educators should strive for transparency in their practice in order to establish trust (Brookfield 2009). It may therefore be necessary to establish, from the outset, that there could be interactions or moments of discomfort in the course (Rogers 2011).

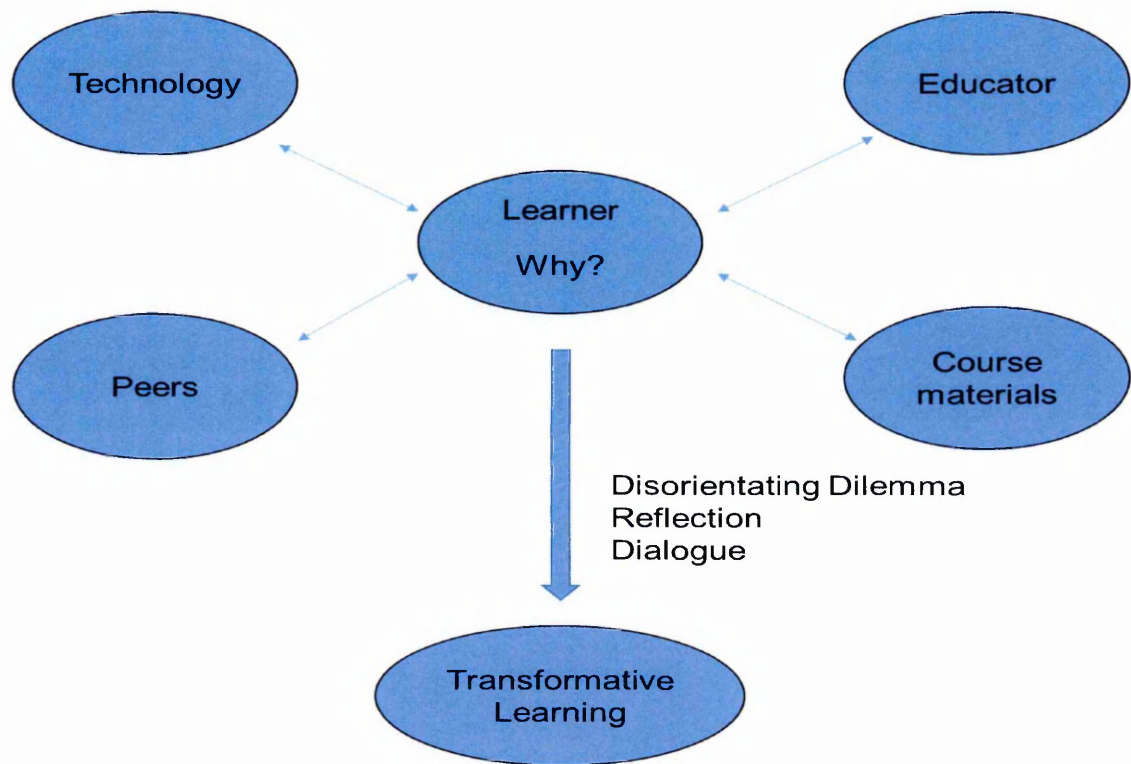
Online learning community

It is the development of an online learning community and the resulting interactions that creates the conditions for fostering transformative learning. Lear *et al* (2010) found that interactivity was key to building an online learning community and helped learners become active and feel more engaged. Interactivity connects learners, online educators, online course material and online technology together. These findings were replicated by Chu *et al* (2010), whose research exploring the relationships between self-directed learning readiness and transformative learning theory, found that interaction between learners was the most significant method for fostering transformative learning. The creation of online forums, instant messaging and audio video without word limits were most helpful in promoting dialogue (*ibid*). Figure 2.3 illustrates the process of interactivity within an online learning community. As learners interact with the course materials, their fellow peers, and the technology, they may find themselves considering alternative perspectives and begin to look at things in a different way. They may ask 'Why?': Why am I feeling this way? Why do I need to consider these alternative views? What does this all mean for me and my learning? These questions are not restricted to the course materials but may relate to the inner world of learners; the broader landscape of transformative learning (Dirkx 2014). As Dirkx (2001) suggests in pursuit of intellectual and cognitive growth learners may become more aware of their inner world, which has

the potential to foster transformative learning but often these transformations are incidental rather than the primary curricular aim. Taylor and Laros (2104:6) use the phrase 'by-product' to refer to incidental transformations. As learners engage with and work through these 'why' questions the potential for fostering transformative learning may be realised as illustrated in Figure 2.3.

Misanchuk and Anderson (2000) found that a key indicator in establishing the creation of a learning community was when learners communicated on a personal as well as an academic level. For example Henderson (2010:2) proposes that sharing 'initial personal introductions, posting of photographs, answering questions about interests and life experiences, and video or audio welcoming messages' all help to foster an online learning community. Online learners noted that hearing an educator's voice comforted them, developed a sense of closeness and therefore encouraged them to ask questions more openly (*ibid*). Meyers (2008) acknowledges the affective dimension of online interaction and, in his role as an online educator, engages in more personal disclosure online, believing that this personalisation promotes trust and openness. The online context offers opportunities for learners to interact in multiple ways with their fellow learners and educators (Shackelford and Maxwell 2012). Palloff and Pratt (2005) note that interaction online enhances learning outcomes and minimises the potential for learner isolation.

Figure 2.3: Online learning community: interactivity



In their discussion of the essential elements critical to the development of an online learning community Palloff and Pratt (2007) note the importance of relevance. Being able to make links with the online course content enhances the learning process and promotes a sense of being an expert. Relevance of the course content ensures every learner has something relevant to share with the group. It encourages learners to bring their experiences into the online learning community and assists the entire group in the meaning-making process, thereby fostering the potential for transformative learning (*ibid*). As professional practitioners, learners undertaking an online Childhood Practice Degree are in a unique position as they are part of an online learning community as well as an online community of practice. Henri and Pudelko (2003:483) define an online community of practice as ‘develops among people who, in the real world, are already part of a given community of practice, i.e. practise the same trade or share the same working conditions’. An online community of practice is viewed as a cohesive group who have a strong social

bond and a desire to undertake an activity with a learning goal. As established members of a community of practice, it could be assumed that prior to joining the degree, learners already shared common professional interests, knowledge and experiences, and this may have had a positive impact on the development of an online learning community. Having an already defined sense of belonging and connection related to their professional practice may encourage learners to share more openly their experiences, be more willing to learn from each other, as well as be more accepting of differences, which have the potential to create conditions for fostering transformative learning.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) identify another five essential elements critical to the development of an online learning community: honesty, responsiveness, respect, openness and empowerment. For members of an online learning community to connect, a sense of safety and trust is necessary as well as the creation of a caring and respectful ethos, one in which learners feel open with each other and the educator. Honest, yet constructive, feedback delivered respectfully is essential to the creation of an online learning community, and has the potential to facilitate transformative learning (Palloff and Pratt 2007). Responsive interaction between all members of an online learning community has the capacity to develop learners' understanding of the course materials and foster a sense of collaboration which further contributes to them feeling connected. This enables learners to reflect critically upon their personal views and professional practice therefore potentially leading to transformative learning. A sense of empowerment is realised through participating in an online learning community. As learners feel comfortable to explore alternative perspectives they may gain an altered view of themselves and a growing sense of self confidence in their ability to interact with their fellow learners and their educator, making use of the new knowledge or insight they have acquired.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have set the context for the empirical research and findings that follow. Transformative learning was first introduced to the field of adult education by Mezirow over thirty years ago. While viewed as a complex theoretical concept which presents practical and ethical challenges it has remained an enduring topic of research and theory. However, more recently transformative learning theory has come under scrutiny. In order to prevent it being banished from the field of adult education there is a need to move beyond Mezirow's commitment to cognitive rationality and focus on developing a more unified theoretical perspective that acknowledges the importance of the social, emotional and cognitive dimensions. A unified perspective that recognises the broader landscape of transformative learning and multiple ways of knowing. As an educational setting the online context has the potential and the tools capable of fostering transformative learning. Although learning online naturally diminishes the significance of physical proximity it perhaps focuses more attention on the process of interactivity and the development of an online learning community that moves beyond the simple transmission of information to deep learning that changes learners' perspectives (Boyer *et al* 2006). While human interactions create the conditions capable of fostering transformative learning online, technology is the enabler. Therefore, in my view, the process of interactivity and the technology are equally significant in creating the conditions capable of promoting a transformation. In the next chapter I outline my methodological influences, research methods and ethical considerations.

Chapter Three Research Methodology

...email appears to provide a context for the kind of non-coercive and anti-hierarchical dialogue that Habermas claimed constitutes an 'ideal speech situation', free of internal or external coercion, and characterised by equality of opportunity and reciprocity in roles assumed by participants (Boshier 1990:51).

Introduction

The rationale for this research project centres on the three aspects outlined in Chapter One and led to a number of research questions which have guided and informed decisions made in relation to my research methodology. In order to understand my research, and assess its credibility and potential contribution to knowledge, it is necessary to outline my philosophical underpinnings, methodologies, methods and ethical considerations. These provide a lens through which I examined the research process and data collected (James and Busher 2009). This lens also provides insight into my views on the construction of knowledge; as a researcher I subscribe to certain epistemological and ontological assumptions. The aim of this chapter is therefore to present my methodological and theoretical influences, research methods and ethical considerations.

While it may be viewed as advantageous, my dual role as a professional practitioner and an academic researcher did pose challenges. As well as researching the organisation in which I was employed, I was a Module Leader for two of the six modules the participants studied and their Programme Leader. Relationships with the participants had developed prior to my research commencing and I had to be mindful of ways in which this may have influenced the data collected. I also had to remain cautious of the impact my own views had on the way in which I interpreted

and analysed the data. Thomas (2009:109) refers to this as 'positionality'. It could be argued that researching an organisation in which I am employed lacks credibility on the ground that detachment and objectivity cannot be achieved. However, I would argue that the opportunity to research one's own practice and organisation offers insight and is of value particularly with regard to developing pedagogical thinking, influencing policy and instigating organisational change. The role of subjectivity was acknowledged but as an academic researcher I made every effort to remain balanced and reflexive throughout the research process. The validity and reliability of the data collected depended ultimately on my skill as an academic researcher and accuracy as an investigator, facilitator, moderator and interpreter (Wilson and Train 2006).

Research methodology

In their most recent review of empirical research on transformative learning, Taylor and Snyder (2011) reflect on the general trends with regard to research methodologies, noting that the research designs employed were predominantly qualitative approaches. The central strength of a qualitative approach for collecting data on transformative learning is its ability to uncover deeper understandings of participants' experiences (Illingworth 2006). Transformative learning does not depend upon measurable skills and quantifiable indicators but rather reflects a more personal journey of improved confidence, self-esteem, attitudinal change and motivation which promote new levels of self-understanding (Patton, 2002). A qualitative methodology therefore allows an exploration and evaluation of these personal experiences which are dependent upon human reflection, perception and interpretation, as well as interpersonal communication between researcher and participant in establishing a degree of trust (Wilson and Train 2006). Understanding and trust between the researcher and participant are key characteristics of a

qualitative methodology. A strong feature of a qualitative methodology is an interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience. Adopting a qualitative approach also offers the opportunity to explore 'the local experience and illuminate and influence local experience' (Thomas, 2009:7). The choice to adopt a qualitative methodology is a recognition that the rationale, research questions and theoretical themes would be best explored through this methodological approach.

A qualitative methodology is grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist'. An interpretivist paradigm supports a view that there are no absolutes. Individuals will experience and interpret a situation differently and therefore 'realities are not abstract objects but rather dependent on the intersubjectivity' between individuals (Burgess *et al* 2006:55). At the core of interpretivism is an interest in acquiring an understanding of what is unique and particular to the individual rather than of what is general and universal (Cohen and Manion, 1989). My chosen research methodology and philosophical position led me to embrace certain epistemological and ontological assumptions. These assumptions are linked and had an impact on the way I undertook the research process, identified the research themes and answered the research questions. I embraced a constructivist epistemology which rejected an objectivist view of human knowledge. A constructivist stance believes that truth and meaning are constructed not discovered (James and Busher 2009), and as a researcher, my interactions with the participants would have an impact on the way in which they constructed meaning. My overarching assumption was that meaning and knowledge can be constructed in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon of interest.

Research method

In my EdD first year pilot project I adopted a narrative approach using face-to-face life history interviews. The decision to adopt this approach and method was influenced by my research questions, rationale and theoretical themes, as well as my reading of Atkinson (1998), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Dominice (2000), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Merrill and West (2009). The pilot project consisted of three participants who were interviewed twice. This proved to be a time consuming process, each interview lasting approximately two hours. As a novice life history interviewer, challenges were also faced in keeping participants focused. A significant amount of data collected was not relevant to the research themes/questions which posed further challenges when analysing the data.

While I remained committed to collecting participants' narratives for my final research project I began to explore alternative research methods. The use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews was initially considered, however the sample size for my final research project was nineteen and only four participants lived locally. To address this issue telephone or skype interviews were explored but taking into consideration participants' already busy lives arranging and coordinating nineteen time slots would have proved challenging. I therefore began to explore the online context as a potential research setting. This was a natural progression given my research rationale and it reflected the context in which participants undertook their studies. At this point I also briefly considered interviewing Childhood Practice colleagues but quickly came to the conclusion that this would not be in line with my research rationale and would distract from my focus on the learners' experiences. Using the online context as a research setting would address issues related to geography and time constraints and participants were already familiar with this context. Initially I considered the use of online asynchronous focus groups but felt

not all participants would engage or feel at ease with the process of group participation and this would restrict self-disclosure, thereby having an impact on the depth of data collected. I then began to explore the use of email interviews. Email is the main form of communication utilised in the Childhood Practice Degree and therefore making use of this online context offered an obvious solution to the issues I was facing.

The research method used in my final research project was qualitative semi-structured email interviews. A semi-structured interview is more loosely defined than a structured approach. Careful wording of interview questions is essential to ensure relevance of data collected and also to encourage participants to engage with the process. While they can be time consuming and often viewed as subjective and prone to bias there was the view that, as a technique, semi-structured interviews would yield rich data which would shed light on the research questions (Bell 2010). In my research design, each participant was presented with the same open ended questions in the same sequences, but follow-up questions and probes varied (Salmons 2010). One of the strengths of using semi-structured interviews is its adaptability. The opportunity to probe and explore aspects in more detail would not have been possible had I used a questionnaire or structured interview. The use of open ended questions would also offer participants latitude to discuss aspects about themselves that related to their individual and unique experiences (Burgess *et al* 2006). Metaphorically, my role as the interviewer could be viewed as a 'gardener', I planted 'the seeds of the interaction with a question', then cultivated responses 'with follow-ups, prompts and encouragement' (Salmons 2012:19). As a research method a semi-structured email interview can involve multiple email exchanges between the interviewer and interviewee over an extended period of time, which is the approach I adopted. The email exchange was asynchronous rather than

synchronous. An asynchronous exchange gave participants time to reflect, change or amend their responses to questions emailed and as a result detailed and well-thought out responses were often the outcome.

The practical benefits of conducting research online have been well documented (Seymour 2001, Illingworth 2001 and 2006, Bampton and Cowton 2002, Madge and O'Connor 2004, Meho 2006, McCoyd and Kerson 2006, James 2007, James and Busher 2009 and Salmons 2012). In a pioneering piece of literature on the use of email interviews as an online research method, Selwyn and Robson (1998:4) outlined the following benefits: low administrative costs, ease of distribution, not constrained by geographical location, no additional transcription and the 'data that is eventually analysed is exactly what the interviewee wrote'. While not demeaning the value of these benefits in determining the most appropriate research method, what follows is an exploration of what I feel to be the more significant factors related to the methodological considerations that arise as a result of using email interviews to collect data. In doing so an exploration of how the online setting is both perceived and understood is presented. Illingworth (2001) reminds us that if the methodological and ethical challenges of online research remain unchecked they may serve to undermine the use of the online environment as a tool for social research.

Online research using email interviews follows the same fundamental steps and thinking involved in any research design but there is an added dimension – the technology. When the direct interaction between the researcher and participant takes place online, technology is more than a simple transactional medium. The human qualities that are deemed so important to interview communications are experienced differently in ways that are both subtle and obvious when the communication takes place online. Face-to-face interaction is thought to be the

most powerful way to gain an insight into how participants construct their experiences; 'bodily presence signifies strong commitment, openness, good practice and the likelihood of 'authentic' research outcomes' (Seymour 2001:155). However, email interviews, despite the absence of face-to-face interactions, do have the potential to create a setting for research purposes and to facilitate greater disclosure of personal information (Bowker and Tuffin 2004) as participants may feel less threatened. This view is further supported by the work of McCoyd and Kerson (2006) who found that during email interviews participants' responses were genuine, thoughtful, included more self-reflection and were seemingly more candid. Concerns that emotional content may not be forthcoming were unfounded. James (2007) also found that email interviewing offered participants the freedom to engage in critical dialogue and as a result developed a greater understanding of their identity construction.

An email interview allows for a more 'developed degree in interaction, reflexivity, disclosure and trust to develop' between the researcher and participant (Illingworth 2001:14). Whether communicated face-to-face or through email, qualitative researchers should trust participants to inform them of their experiences as interpreted through their perspectives (McCoyd and Kerson 2006). The use of email interviews can create a democratisation of exchange that eludes more conventional research methods (Selwyn and Robson 1998).

Online research using email interviews does hold promise, however its potential should not be exaggerated. Many of the challenges of conventional face-to-face research still apply in the virtual context. Stacey and Vincent (2011) identify the following challenges: threats to the quality of interview data, distortions of the participants' responses and misinterpretations of non-verbal behaviours of both the interviewer and interviewee. While the experiences of these challenges are similar,

Illingworth (2001) claims that they are more acute within online research where the lack of face-to-face dynamics and the lack of observational and non-verbal cues suggest the demands placed on the online researcher necessitate a developed familiarity with online communication. As an online researcher I remained mindful of these demands and reflected on the skills required to interface online including issues related to sensitivity, validity and interaction. Added to this list were issues around the authenticity of participants' voice in an online setting (James and Busher 2006). What follows is an exploration of these issues.

Online research: issues arising

There is the view that when email interviewing is used in isolation the data is 'faceless' and 'body-less' which creates key challenges to traditional notions of qualitative research (Ison 2009). In a face-to-face interview, both the interviewer and interviewee would normally be able to sense and respond to body language and voice inflections (Stacey and Vincent 2011). It is therefore advisable that online researchers find other ways of expressing mood and emotion and present themselves as a warm and caring person in order to establish rapport with the participants. This is further supported by Beck (2005:421) who notes 'e-mails to participants should be crafted carefully to allow your....authentic presence and listening to come out loud and clear'. Seasoned online users will often make use of 'emoticons' to augment the meaning of textual electronic messages (Rezabek and Cochenour 1998). However, the actual communicative effect of using emoticons as verbal cues is minimal; at best they merely compliment the verbal content of the email message (Walther and D'Addario 2001).

There are concerns about the credibility and authenticity of the data collected using email interviews. Seymour (2001) argues that we should feel no more or less confident with online data than with data collected in face-to-face research as

participants in the latter are also able to create their own 'invisibilities'. Whether online or face-to-face there is a need for researchers to develop a sense about the truthfulness and authenticity of participants' responses. Although the use of email interviews allows the online researcher to track conversations and record them, thereby creating a continuous visible record which allows for an interrogation of the authenticity of participants' voices, the possibility remains that the participants may not be who they claimed to be (James and Busher 2006). Face-to-face interviewers may feel reassured by the presence of the physical body, however the comfort this brings should not be overestimated. Whether face-to-face or online the body is always present: 'it shapes, informs and is itself influenced by interactions that take place' (Seymour 2001:165). O'Connor and Madge (2001) support this view noting that participants do not leave the body when they enter an online environment. In online or face-to-face research participants cannot escape from their lived experiences; their commitments and values shape who they are and influence their interactions regardless of the context. Having prior knowledge of the participants can assist the online researcher in verifying credibility and authenticity of the data collected. Where relationships with participants are established prior to the research commencing this provides 'insider' knowledge and understanding which enables the online researcher to verify participants' identity more easily. Continuous investment in the online research relationship, consisting of mutual disclosure and repeated interactions, further reassures the online researcher about the authenticity of the participants' online responses (James and Busher 2009). The creation of deep, meaningful and personal relationships is possible through email interviewing, and has the potential to provide insightful data on participants' experiences and feelings (Dowling 2012).

An asynchronous email interview offers a new space and dimension for communicating, however it is necessary to consider the resulting impact of the

online context on the participants' responses. Email responses combine the characteristics of both oral and written communication. Often participants will respond as if they were speaking. The email interview offers a space for participants to explore how they write in relation to their personal experiences and offers space to reflect and space to be silent. In relation to time, interactions during email interviews will involve pauses of differing lengths between bursts of communication, while in relation to space, the relationship takes place at a distance through the medium of electronic text (Bampton and Cowton 2002). While there is a loss of spontaneity, time and space can increase reflexivity for participants to construct, reflect upon, and learn from their stories of experience (James 2007).

Ethical considerations

Regardless of the context an interview is a social process in which a researcher and a participant interact and exchange information. With this in mind, I had a duty of care to the participants that took part in my research, which required me to adopt an ethical attitude throughout the research project. There were several ethical principles I had to consider in planning to undertake online research involving human participants: free and informed consent, minimal intrusion, does not harm, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, data protection, and debriefing. These principles and standards governing the ethical treatment of human participants are well known and widely agreed upon (Scottish Education Research Association (SERA) 2005, Open University (OU) 2006, UHI 2010, British Education Research Association (BERA) 2011 and Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) 2012). However, the work of Smythe and Murray (2000), Gottlieb and Lasser (2001), Josselson (2007) and Sikes (2010), broadened my knowledge and understanding of research ethics beyond these traditional, regulatory principles and as a result raised my awareness of the need to adopt an ethical attitude when conducting my

research project. I felt it was therefore important to explore the concept of ethical attitude and how it could impact the collection and analysis of the data.

Smythe and Murray (2000) refer to 'narrative ownership' as a central ethical problem. The participants had an essential stake in the interpretation of their words and, therefore, as a qualitative researcher, there were challenges in separating an ethical attitude from my epistemological stance. I acknowledged that there could be multiple interpretations of participants' experiences and recognised that my interactions with the participants during the interview process would have an impact on the way in which they constructed their experiences. As a qualitative researcher interested in encouraging participants to openly share their experiences it was not possible or desirable to pre-determine what data would be collected or how it would be used (Burgess *et al* 2006). This posed challenges related to informed consent. It was therefore necessary for me to sustain the process of informed consent throughout the research project.

The work of Salmons (2012) offered more insight on issues related to my personal influences and potential for subjectivity. As a researcher I could adopt different positions: 'etic', the outsider looking in or 'emic', the insider taking part (*ibid*). An insider is often driven to carry out the research because they have an understanding of the issue and a desire from both a personal and scholarly perspective to develop a deeper insight. Although I did view myself as an insider I made a conscious effort to adopt a more balanced position: I shared experiences of the research phenomena (emic/insider) but tried not to contribute to the data (etic/outsider) (Salmons 2012:18). However, I acknowledged that my presence during the email interview contributed to the construction of the data.

I recognised the existence of a power differential which favoured me as the researcher. While I was no longer the participants' Module Tutor or Programme Leader, and although almost a year had passed since we last actively interacted, I still had to remain mindful of potential power inequalities. Although the use of email interviews may address some aspects of the perceived power inequalities, there was still a risk that it could enhance them. As James and Busher claim (2009:95) 'power relations do not go away in the anonymity of the internet'. I therefore had to consider the impact this may have on participants' willingness to share personal experiences during their interviews, which could lead to them withholding pertinent data. I also had to consider the issue of credibility. As I was unable to physically 'see' the participants it was not possible to determine who was actually taking part during their interviews. However, having prior knowledge of participants as well as my role as an insider put me in a position where establishing who was interacting with me during the interviews was more easily determined.

I was aware that the participants may have felt a sense of marginality, in that they did not have an opportunity to see me face-to-face, and therefore the essence of a human communication may have been missing. This could have had an impact on the participants feeling less committed to the research project. However, as both researcher and participants were seasoned email users the online context appeared to present minimal barriers to the establishment of what Mann and Stewart (2000:173) refer to as 'rapport talk'. Having developed relationships with the participants prior to the research project enabled me to make use of my social capital to access and engage with willing participants. My insider position also meant that a level of trust and rapport was established before the email interviews commenced, which enabled me to encourage a more collaborative approach. I recognised that the shifting nature of the online engagement had the potential to enable participants

to develop a more defined sense of ownership and control, which I welcomed. Although I imposed an interview framework, which had the potential to enhance the power differential in my favour, the use of a semi-structured email interview offered participants an opportunity to direct conversations and assert control of time and speed of response. As James and Busher (2009:93) note, delays in email interviews are 'the new norms of practice' and reflect 'the shifts in balance of power within the research projects' in favour of participants.

Encouraging participants to share their stories openly and honestly meant I had to remain mindful of the potential for information bias. Participants' stories may have been concerned with 'human intention rather than discrete facts and events' which Stroobants (2005:60) refers to as 'narrative knowing'. The ways in which participants defined these experiences may change over time and develop during the interview process. Participants' perceptions of their experiences may have also changed and developed given the retrospective nature of their stories. While remaining alert to these factors the interview offered participants an opportunity to enhance their working knowledge of themselves. Biesta and Tedder (2008) view this process as learning-in-action. Although I openly acknowledged the potential for participant bias and subjectivity I was less inclined to debate if their stories were 'true' or 'false' but was rather more concerned with interrogating the experiences as told by them. As a result I encouraged participants to share personal perspectives and feelings. In adopting an ethical attitude my role was to interact with participants humbly, and protect their well-being in my attempt to learn from them.

Prior to commencing the research project ethical approval had been granted by UHI (Appendices A and B). Issues related to confidentiality, data protection and anonymity were outlined during the informed consent process as noted on the covering letter (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D). A copy of the letter

and consent form was emailed to the participants prior to the commencement of the research. An initial email was also sent to participants, before their interviews began, in which they were reminded of these issues and included guidance notes on the interview process (Appendix E). It was made clear that only once they responded to this initial email would the first set of interview questions be issued. While this may seem rather repetitive I felt it was necessary as there was a time delay between participants returning their consent form and the commencement of their interview. I wanted to clarify that continued consent was given. To further ensure privacy, participants were also required to indicate the email address they wanted me to use throughout their interview.

The interview process was constructed in a manner that would hopefully have minimal intrusion on participants' lives. The online context itself presented an ideal environment which offered participants space and time to engage with the interview in a way that fitted around their already busy lives. I also made a conscious effort to limit the number of questions included in each set. To help me coordinate and manage the research process better I created folders for each participant within my Outlook Office 365 work email account which was password protected. I ensured that I always emailed participants individually and all email correspondence was stored in their folders. Participants were also offered an opportunity to engage in further email dialogue once their interview was complete (Appendix E, point 8). As the email interviews came to an end each participant was given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. It was made clear that this would be the name they would be referred to throughout my writing and therefore ensured confidentiality and anonymity was maintained.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to outline my epistemological and methodological influences as well as my research methods and ethical considerations. As a qualitative researcher influenced by an interpretive perspective, the following assumptions were made: 'the human world is constructed by its inhabitants', there are multiple views of the same phenomenon and participants and researchers work together to construct understandings of situations (James and Busher 2009:130). Based on these assumptions, the construction of knowledge is co-owned by both research participants and researcher undertaking the research. Online research offers a context in which participants can take more ownership of discourse as they can return to it, edit and amend and therefore redefine the phenomenon. While there may be a power differential in favour of the researcher, the construction of knowledge in an online context remains open to constant negotiation and collaboration between participant and researcher. The use of email interviews as an online research method should not be viewed as an easy option. There are challenges related to establishing authenticity and in addressing complex methodological and ethical considerations. However, email interviews, despite the absence of face-to-face interactions, do have the potential to create a setting for research purposes and have the potential to facilitate disclosure of personal information (Bowker and Tuffin 2004). In the next chapter I discuss how I collected and analysed the data from a theoretical and procedural perspective.

Chapter Four Data Collection and Analysis

...for it is to them that we owe our care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories that sustain them....as researchers, we also owe our care and responsibility....to the conversation of a scholarly discourse (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:173/4).

Introduction

Figuring out what to do with the qualitative data once collected has been called 'the most paralysing moment' in qualitative analysis (Sandelowski 1995:371). This may go some way to explain why a number of qualitative researchers rely on qualitative software packages. However, it is peopleware, not software that undertakes the process of qualitative analysis (Jennings 2007). The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I present aspects associated with collecting the data including a discussion of the sampling strategy, a summary of characteristics related to the nineteen participants who took part in this research project and the procedure for gathering the data. Secondly, I explore the process of data analysis from a theoretical as well as a procedural perspective and discuss factors that influenced how I constructed participants' transformations.

Collecting the data: sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was selected as an appropriate sampling strategy. This approach is a non-probability sampling technique which is also referred to as selective or subjective sampling as it relies on the judgement of the researcher in selecting research participants (Manson 1996). Purposive sampling does not claim to be empirically representative but rather involves selecting a sample which is of interest to the researcher. The use of purposive sampling therefore

enabled me to select participants on the basis that their experiences would be of relevance to my research questions and interests. This informed the overriding criteria for sampling which was: all participants were graduates who had completed an online Childhood Practice Degree at UHI one year prior to taking part in the research project. The decision to only sample graduates as participants was based on the following factors:

- only including graduates would ensure the data collected reflected the experience of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI in its entirety;
- retrospective stories would enable the graduates to reflect on their experiences and how they understood their development (Leibowitz 2009). There was an interest in participants' intentions, rather than discrete facts and events, and there was an acknowledgment that there are rarely single accounts of reality but rather multiple interpretations (Smythe and Murray 2000);
- the process of reflecting back would offer the graduates an opportunity to increase their working knowledge of themselves as they discovered deeper meaning in their lives by putting the experiences and feelings that they lived through during their studies into written expression. Bruner (1986) refers to this as narrative knowledge which is created and co-constructed through the stories participants told about their lived experiences, and the meaning they gave to those experiences over time that might change and develop as their stories unfolded;
- the experience of transformative learning may not be realised until sometime after completing their studies, the decision to only include graduates acknowledged this aspect.

All twenty graduates from the class of 2012 were invited to take part in the research and all agreed to become participants. Due to excessive work commitments one participant withdrew in the early stages prior to her interview commencing. This left a sample size of nineteen. All nineteen participants remained until the end of the research process.

Biographical details are provided for each participant in Appendix F. The following briefly outlines characteristics related to the nineteen participants that took part in this research project. All nineteen participants were defined as non-traditional learners whose average age was 46 at the time of my research. They had completed a vocational qualification, for example Scottish Nursery Nurse Education Board (SNNEB), Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ), Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Professional Development Award (PDA), prior to joining the degree and were employed within a relevant childhood practice setting. Eleven were managers and, of these, four owned the setting. Of the remaining eight, six were employed as nursery nurses, one was employed as a learning support assistant and one as a play co-ordinator. Seventeen were employed full-time and two on a part-time basis. Reasons for entering the childhood practice profession varied: four noted that they 'fell' into the profession, stating that the decision was 'unplanned'; one stated that it was viewed as an 'easy option'; five entered the profession after having their own children, mainly as a result of volunteering in their children's nursery/playgroup; and nine had aspired to working in the profession from a young age. Sixteen of the participants were married, two were divorced, one was in a long-term relationship and fifteen were mothers. Ross-Gordon (2011) refers to the multiple roles of non-traditional learners: worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver and community member. While these multiple roles can be viewed as an asset, more often they presented

many and varied challenges; juggling time often being noted as the greatest issue faced. Sixteen of the participants in this research project were the first members of their family/generation to undertake HE study.

Collecting the data: the procedure

Having not used email interviews as part of my first year pilot study, I initiated this process with one participant. This allowed me to review progress before commencing with the remaining eighteen participants. Once the initial email interview was established the remaining eighteen participants were contacted to confirm their participation and sent the guidance notes. The majority responded promptly and the first set of interview questions were emailed. Two delays in responding were recorded, one due to IT difficulties the other was due to personal circumstances which prevented an earlier response.

As noted in Chapter Three I adopted a semi-structured approach to the email interviews. This entailed emailing each participant the same set of interview questions in the same sequence but follow-up questions varied. The sets of interview questions are outlined in Table 4.1. Initially only five sets of questions were developed (first, second, third, fourth and sixth sets). However, based on an analysis of participants' initial responses, in particular initial responses from the first participant to undertake the interview process, another set of slightly more prescribed questions were devised as a way to gather more specific data (fifth set of questions noted in Table 4.1). Therefore, in total, participants were emailed the same six sets of interview questions in the same sequence. The first set were viewed as introductory questions; their intention being to encourage participants to engage with the interview process. The sixth set encouraged participants to reflect on their interview as a way to bring the process to a conclusion.

Table 4.1: Sets of interview questions

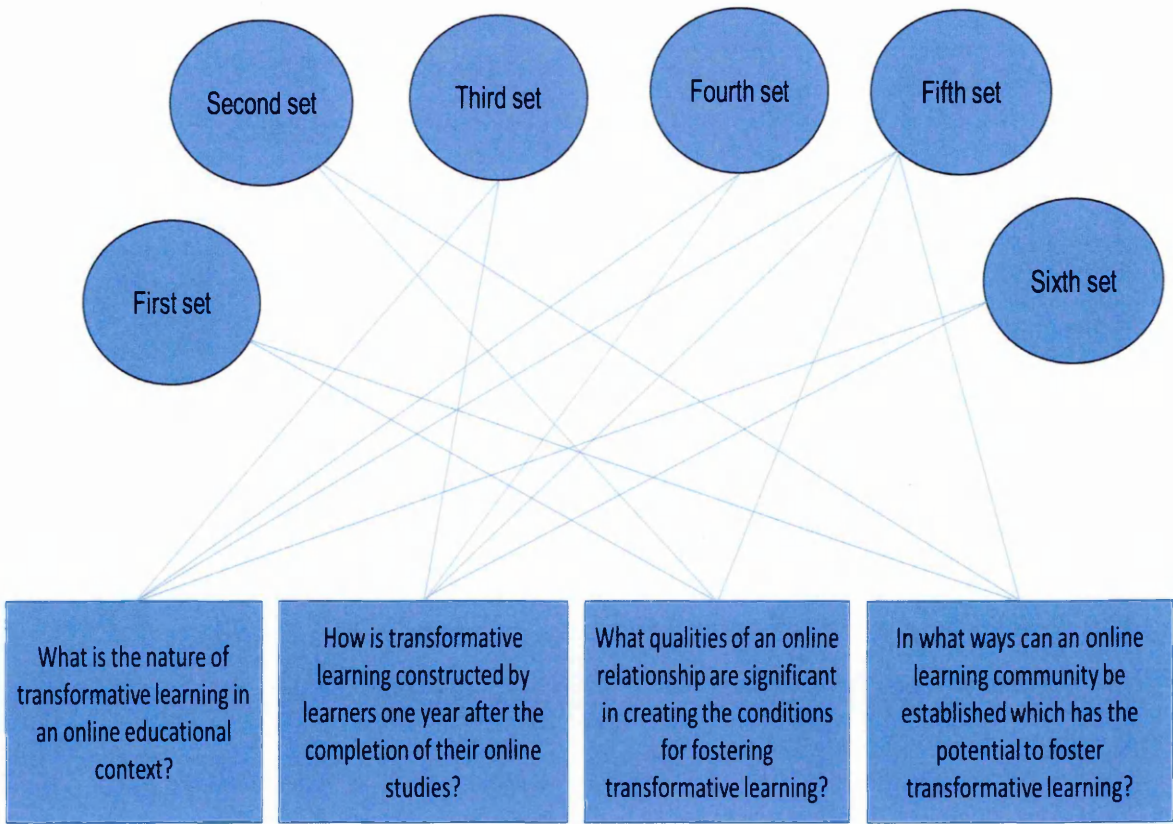
First set	<p>What originally led you to pursue a career working with young children? Explore your thoughts for me.</p> <p>Why did you decide to undertake an online Childhood Practice Degree at UHI?</p>
Second set	<p>Explore what made you feel most engaged/connected as you studied an online Childhood Practice Degree and tease out reasons why this was the case for you.</p> <p>Were there any significant challenges/incidents/individuals that impacted your experiences while studying an online Childhood Practice Degree? Explore these for me and outline reasons why they were significant for you.</p>
Third set	<p>During your studies were there moments where you reflected upon/questioned your personal viewpoints/opinions in relation to your professional role or personal life? Please describe these moments and outline reasons why they made you reflect.</p> <p>Discuss what surprised or has surprised you the most as a result of studying an online Childhood Practice Degree?</p>
Fourth set	<p>Outline the ways in which studying affected you both personally and professionally.</p> <p>In what ways has your view of the world, your life and professional identity been affected as a result of studying an online Childhood Practice Degree?</p> <p>Imagine your best friend was asked to describe you before, during and after you completed a Childhood Practice Degree. How would they respond?</p>

Fifth set	<p>Reflecting on the online learning environment can you explore ways this environment assisted your learning experiences and why?</p> <p>In what ways did this environment make it more challenging for you to learn and why?</p> <p>Reflecting on the module tutors, can you tease out in what ways they assisted/challenged your learning experiences. Were there particular characteristics that assisted/challenged you; what were these and why did they assist/challenge you?</p> <p>Are you able to identify any 'turning points' during your studies? For example, a point where you felt things 'clicked' or you began to have a different self-view or your professional identity altered. Explore these for me and outline reasons why.</p>
Sixth set	<p>To conclude your email interview I would like to offer you an opportunity to openly reflect on the interview process. Can you please share with me your thoughts, views, feelings on the email interview process. It may be useful for you to go back and read all your responses as a starting point.</p> <p>Finally, select one word that describes/reflects how you feel as a result of completing an online Childhood Practice Degree.</p>

The structure and wording of the interview questions were influenced by a number of factors: the project's research questions which reflected my research interests, my reading of the literature related to transformative learning, the research methodology and my own creativity. As noted by Reissman (1993:v) 'the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it'. Figure 4.1 outlines connections between the sets of interview questions and the project's research questions. The main purpose of the interview questions was to collect data relating to the project's research questions. Where possible

interview questions were open-ended and the inclusion of leading questions was avoided. Each set of interview questions addressed at least two of the project's research questions. The sets of interview questions were structured to encourage participants to explore and reflect on their experiences while undertaking an online Childhood Practice Degree at UHI. There were elements of repetition threaded within the questions which was intentional and reflected my desire to probe further in an attempt to gather data related to potential transformations and contributing factors. There was an overall sense of 'digging' deeper with each set of interview questions.

Figure 4.1: Connections between sets of interview questions and research questions



In devising the interview questions I was aware that asking questions directly related to transformative learning could cause confusion which, in turn, could affect participants' willingness to engage and remain committed to the interview

process. While there was an awareness of my research focus I could not assume participants had prior knowledge or understanding of transformative learning. I recognised that successfully capturing participants' transformations and identifying contributing factors could prove elusive. Participants may not be consciously aware of experiencing a transformation and therefore would find it challenging to explicitly articulate the process and identify factors that fostered the process. Alternatively they may be aware but struggle to translate this experience into words or perhaps be unwilling or unable to openly share their experiences. I also appreciated that some participants may not have experienced the process. Taking these factors into consideration and to avoid the possibility of leading participants the phrase transformative learning was not included in the interview questions.

The time taken to complete each interview was based on the number of follow-up questions as well as the time delay between each email exchange. It quickly became apparent that the original time scale of four to six weeks for completion of the email interviews was unrealistic; the average time taken was twelve weeks. The original number of email exchanges noted on the interview guide as 'should not exceed 10' was also exceeded. In reality the average number of exchanges, once consent was established, was sixteen; the shortest was twelve and the longest twenty. The total number of email exchanges, once consent was established, was three hundred and ten.

Informed by the work of Dommeyer and Moriarty (2000), each set of questions and follow-up questions were embedded in an email rather than sent as an attachment. I tried to limit the number of questions embedded in each email exchange to prevent a delay in response and interview fatigue. The use of open-ended questions and individual follow-up questions was intentional as there was

a desire to encourage participants to engage with the email interview as if they were having a conversation, an on-going dialogue during which they shared stories of their experiences. This approach was reinforced in the email interview guidance which was emailed prior to the interviews commencing (Appendix E, point 6). While the interviews were viewed as conversations, they were conversations with a purpose. However, although I predominantly took on the role as 'listener' I also engaged with participants encouraging them to respond. This approach is supported by Merrill (1986:77) who proposes that 'interviewing is not a one-way process with the researcher exploiting the researched for their own ends'.

The opportunity to ask individual follow-up questions further enhanced the natural flow to the on-going dialogue and contributed to the continued investment in the online relationship. However, managing nineteen email interviews within the same time frame proved challenging and had an impact on the number of follow-up questions presented to all nineteen participants. At times it felt like I was mentally engaged in nineteen conversations simultaneously. As a result I struggled to find the time, space and mental energy to meaningfully interpret and analyse responses in an ongoing manner, and therefore the number of follow-up questions lessened as the interviews progressed. When the number of follow-up questions lessened interviews took on a more structured approach, although the open-ended questions still offered participants latitude to explore their individual and unique experiences, thereby ensuring an element of flexibility was maintained.

As already noted, the average time scale for completing the email interviews was longer than expected. The time between each email exchange was also longer than anticipated. The interview guidance notes indicated 'try to

respond.....within five days'. While a significant number of responses were within this time scale, several were significantly longer; the longest being over ninety days. Reasons for delays in responding were: ill health, weddings, IT difficulties, a broken finger, personal issues which prevented a quicker response, work pressures, holidays and birthday celebrations. Although these delays had an impact on the time scale for completing the interviews I do not feel they had a significant impact on the data collected. The use of asynchronous email interviews enabled participants to engage with the process in a flexible manner which fitted around their family and work commitments. This allowed participants to have more control of time and the speed with which they responded. When participants' responses were delayed, in line with guidance outlined as part of the informed consent process, they were reminded that they could request to withdraw from the research project. A number of participants commented positively on being able to take their time, noting that being able to respond in their own time with no pressure meant they were able to take part in the research. The time also enabled them to carefully reflect upon their responses. A few participants noted that they initially saved their responses which enabled them to return on several occasions making amendments or adding more detail before pressing send.

The time line of email exchanges for all nineteen participants is detailed and not easily digested (Appendix G). To establish transparency, Figures 4.2 and 4.3 simplify this as well as summarise the procedure of collecting the data. Figure 4.2 outlines the procedure that took place for each set of interview questions. The time line for each email interview varied depending on the response time between each email exchange and also the number of follow up questions emailed. The next set of questions were not sent until responses to either follow

up questions or the previous set of questions were received. This procedure was repeated for all six sets of questions.

Figure 4.2: Example of an email exchange for one set of questions

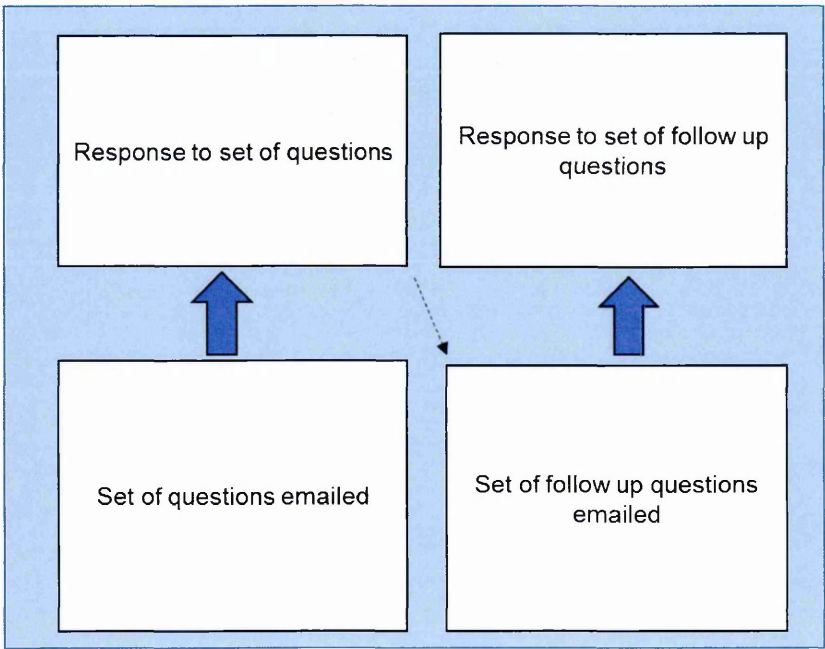
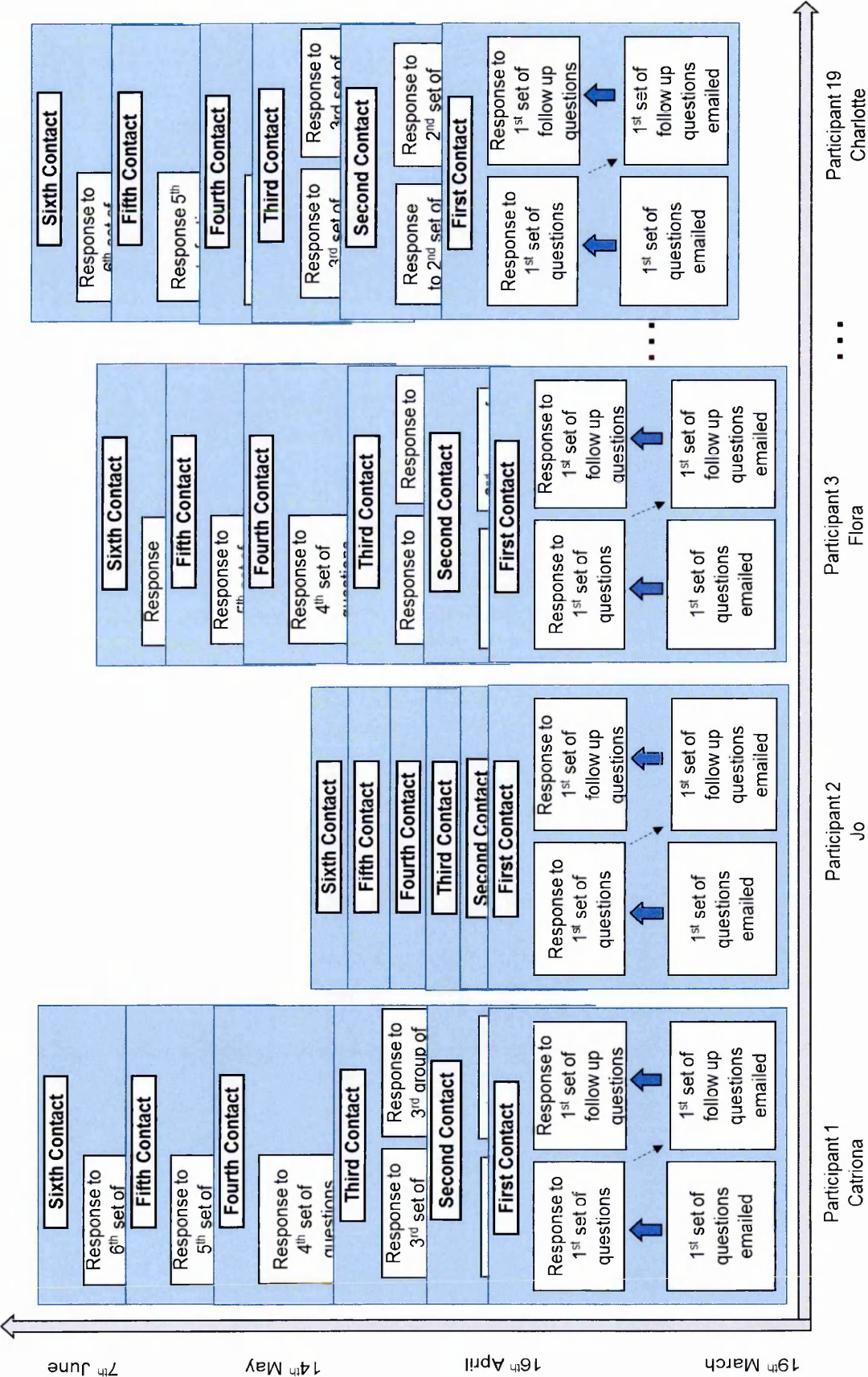


Figure 4.3 provides a visual overview of the time line and number of email exchanges while still capturing the complexity of conducting and managing numerous email interviews within the same time frame. Only four participants have been included as examples to illustrate the process.

Figure 4.3: Overview of email interview timeline



Analysing the data: a 'hybrid' thematic approach

Regardless of the context in which the research takes place, online or face-to-face, there are no distinct differences noted in the literature on how to analyse the qualitative data collected. Smith and Firth (2011) propose that qualitative analysis can be divided into three categories: sociolinguistic methods (discourse and conversation analysis); methods that focus on developing theory (grounded theory); and methods that describe and interpret participants' views (content and thematic analysis). For the purposes of this research project, a thematic approach was adopted to analyse the qualitative data.

Thematic analysis is noted as the most common analytic strategy and arguably the most straightforward. This is supported by Guest *et al* (2012:11) who note thematic analysis is 'the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set'. Although often confused with grounded theory in the qualitative methods literature, thematic analysis keeps 'a story intact by theorising from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases' (Riessman 2008:53). Thematic analysis is an accessible, theoretically flexible approach which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative data analysis. What follows is an exploration of the process of analysing qualitative data making use of a thematic approach.

There is still a great deal of uncertainty with regard to how researchers actually proceed when analysing qualitative data. Jennings (2007:483) refers to her crystal clear memories of puzzling through countless references in her 'quest to derive a better grasp of qualitative analytic techniques'. This is further supported by Dierckx de Casterle *et al* (2012) who acknowledge the complexity and challenges faced when undertaking the process of qualitative analysis, and note that this process has received minimal attention in the research literature. While

there is no singularly appropriate way to conduct qualitative analysis, Bradley *et al* (2007) suggest there is a general consensus that it is an on-going iterative process which begins in the early stages of data collection and continues throughout the research.

Thematic analysis relies on the qualitative researcher's 'expertise in thinking, imagining, conceiving, conceptualising, connecting, condensing and creating' (Jennings 2007:483). While the use of more than one analyst may improve the consistency or reliability of the analysis process, where being embedded in on-going relationships with the research participants is critical for the quality of the data collected, a single researcher is both sufficient and preferred (Bradley *et al* 2007). A reflexive qualitative researcher is sensitive towards themselves and research participants, and acknowledges the impact their own beliefs and understandings have on the research process. This is further supported by Edwards and Weller (2012:207) who note that qualitative researchers cannot 'understand someone separate from their own theoretical orientation and personal experience'. While the process of analysing the data should be transparent, the inter-rater reliability is less of a concern; expecting another researcher to have the same insights from a qualitative data base is unrealistic (Armstrong *et al* 1997).

Thematic analysis can be defined as a systematic search for meaning. It involves the researcher organising and interrogating the data in ways that allows the discovery of patterns, themes, relationships, explanations and theories. In analysing the qualitative data, researchers find themselves engaging with 'their own intellectual capacities to make sense of the data' (Hatch 2002:148). The extent to which thematic analysis is successful is dependent on the skills of those collecting the data. The development of codes and the identification of themes

are based on the researcher's ability to think and imagine. It is the researcher who gives meaning to the codes/themes and does the abstract thinking (Jennings 2007). Only the human mind can think, imagine, conceive, conceptualise, connect, condense and create to analyse qualitative data. This is further supported by Boyatzis (1998) who notes that cognitive complexity is the only prerequisite for researchers undertaking thematic analysis.

Broadly speaking the process of thematic analysis can be influenced by a deductive or inductive approach. A deductive approach is restricted by pre-set aims and objectives which focus the researchers' work with predefined topic guides to extract and manage the data (Smith and Firth 2011). In contrast, an inductive approach reflects the experiences of participants from their perspective, as a result this approach is data-driven. Reflecting on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) I recognised that the approach I adopted had to be consistent with my rationale and theoretical framework. This view was further supported by Reicher and Taylor (2005:549) who note 'rigour lies in devising a systematic method of data analysis whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter'.

Recognising that it was not possible to free myself from my theoretical and epistemological viewpoints it was therefore imperative that I provided a clear account of the approach I adopted. I was also aware of the need to maintain narrative ownership during the data analysis process. However, I found myself faced with a challenge. Chenail (2012:1) refers to this challenge as 'analytic tension'. To address this tension I had to find a balance between maintaining narrative ownership and building more abstracted categories or general concepts. This involved using a more combined technique of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) refer to this as

a 'hybrid approach'. The writings of Merrill and West (2009) offered a degree of reassurance. While the creation of abstract categories may distance the researcher from the unique experiences of participants, abstraction is necessary as it allows the researcher to make comparisons, explore similarities and ultimately uncover collective experiences. Also, if there is no separation then there is no relationship and if there is no relationship then there is no abstraction and therefore no analysis (Chenail 2012). Individual stories can become collective ones and from this, patterns can be explored, theories built 'which help to illuminate more of the particular' (Merril and West 2009:133). The following factors informed my 'hybrid approach': participants' stories, my reading of the literature, the research questions, my intellectual interests and my creativity. There was much 'toing' and 'froing' between these aspects throughout the process of data analysis until I reached a point of saturation.

Analysing the data: the procedure

The art of qualitative data analysis is complex and at times messy. As a novice qualitative researcher I found myself searching for a 'recipe book'. However, there is a reluctance to identify qualitative analytic procedures believing the process is informed by the subjective sensibilities and creativity of the researcher (Dey 1993). Any description of the practicalities would oversimplify the process. I did discover several authors who articulated the procedure of qualitative data analysis as a series of stages, viewed as the analysis continuum (Pope *et al* 2000, Froggart 2001, Connolly 2003, Rabiee 2004, Braun and Clarke 2006 and Smith and Firth 2011). While I made use of the framework approach outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), the six phases of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were most consistent with my theoretical framework and therefore most influential: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial

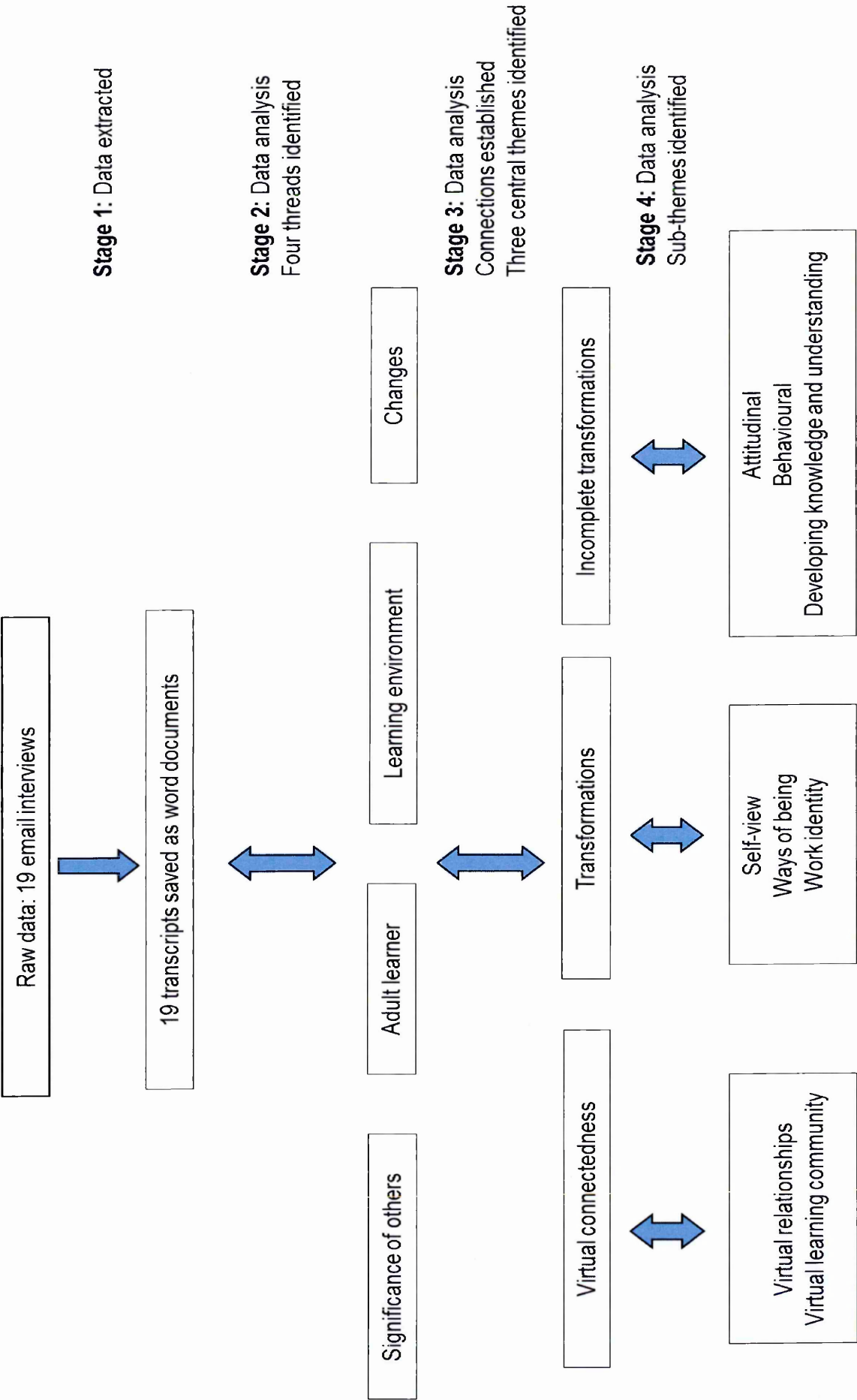
codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Central to these phases is the careful examination of the data, paragraph-by-paragraph, sentence-by-sentence and at times word-by-word. While this proved time consuming it was an essential process and maintained the integrity of participants' stories; that is, 'narrative ownership'. The following questions also guided me: 'What does this theme mean? What are the assumptions underpinning it? What are the implications of the theme? What conditions are likely to have given rise to it? Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)? and What overall story does the different themes reveal about the topic? (Braun and Clarke 2006:94).

Figure 4.4 outlines the main stages of the data analysis process that formed part of this research project. Each stage deepened the level of analysis as well as making the data more manageable and accessible. The first stage involved extracting the data from the nineteen email interviews into nineteen word documents. During the extraction process no changes were made to the sequence or wording of the questions or participants' responses (Appendix H). Stage two involved carefully reading each transcript making note of recurring aspects. Four common threads emerged: significance of others; adult learner; learning environment; and changes (Appendix H). Data related to the four threads was extracted into four word documents (Appendix I, Changes). Participants' responses again remained unchanged during this process. Stage three offered another opportunity to deepen the level of analysis. Upon careful reading of participants' responses related to the four threads, further connections began to emerge which led to the identification of three central themes: virtual connectedness, transformations and incomplete transformations (Appendix I). I initially attempted to operationalise participants' transformations, but quickly

realised that this approach was inappropriate and did not reflect emerging concepts from the literature or participants' experiences.

During the fourth and final stage sub-themes began to emerge from three central themes (Appendix I). For virtual connectedness two sub-themes were identified: virtual relationships and virtual learning community. For transformations three sub-themes were identified: self-view, ways of being and work identity. For incomplete transformations three sub-themes were identified: attitudinal, behavioural and developing knowledge and understanding.

Figure 4.4: Data analysis: the process



Transformations: complete or incomplete

During stages three and four of the data analysis process I constructed participants' transformations. As noted in Chapter Two page 26, Cranton and Taylor (2012) claim that, regardless of the circumstances, the transformative outcomes would be similar. However only focusing on the outcomes ignored, what I considered, a more significant factor: the transformative process; that is, how participants travelled to the outcome, what led them there and what the contributing factors were. With this in mind, when analysing the data, if I was unable to construct the transformative process, the related outcome was not viewed as a transformation. This led to a distinction between what I defined as complete and incomplete transformations. In their research Boyer *et al* (2006:353) used the phrase 'ambiguous instances' to refer to incomplete transformations and noted that they merited further research. What follows is an outline of the factors that influenced the way in which I constructed participants' transformations.

Hoggan's broad definition of transformative learning and his typology of transformative outcomes as described in Chapter Two pages 24 and 25, had a significant influence on how I distinguished between complete and incomplete transformations. Hoggan (2014:14) questions the validity of classifying outcomes as 'truly transformational' when they are limited in nature and specific to only one context. He encourages researchers to only define those outcomes that 'drastically change a person' or broadly impacts a person's life as examples of transformative learning (*ibid*). Therefore, in order to establish the change and the impact, I took the decision that it was necessary to construct the transformative process associated with the outcome. If I was unable to construct the process I defined the outcome as an incomplete transformation. This was not viewed as

an attempt to measure or quantify participants' experiences. Constructing the transformative process ensured I was able to provide evidence to support the related outcome and avoided what Hoggan (2014:14) refers to as overstating the outcome which could lead to the theory of transformative learning falling 'victim to evacuation'.

In making the distinction between complete and incomplete transformations I also referred to Mezirow (2012). As outlined in Chapter Two, Mezirow notes that, to be considered an example of transformative learning, participants' habits of mind would have to significantly change based on a rational process of reflection and discourse. As a result, the way participants experienced and interacted with the world would dramatically alter. Constructing the transformative process enabled me to explore participants' experiences of reflection and discourse and therefore provided evidence to support the transformative outcome. Mezirow's concept of habits of mind and his commitment to cognitive rationality limited the transformative process, therefore when constructing the process, I applied the concept of 'habits of being' as advocated by Kasl and Yorks (2002:8). Habits of being acknowledged multiple ways of knowing and therefore was not restricted to the cognitive dimension of transformative learning. It recognised participants as whole individuals and accepted the interrelationship between reflection and affective learning (Taylor 2000).

The third and final influence was Illeris (2014a/b). As discussed in Chapter Two page 25, Illeris utilises the concept of identity to define transformative learning which acknowledges the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions. This concept enabled me to make a connection between participants' internal and external experiences as I constructed their transformative processes.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on how I collected and analysed the data from a theoretical and procedural perspective. The use of purposive sampling allowed me to select participants on the basis that their experiences would be of relevance to the project's research questions. Nineteen email interviews took place which involved participants being sent the same six sets of interview questions in the same sequence. Follow up questions did vary which added an element of individuality to the process. On average the time taken to complete each interview was twelve weeks and the average number of email exchanges was sixteen; the total number of email exchanges was three hundred and ten. Data was analysed using a hybrid approach which is a combined technique of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. My hybrid approach was informed by the following factors: participants' stories, my reading of the literature, the research questions, my intellectual interests and my creativity. While participants' stories remained at the heart of my research, as a researcher, I also recognised the need to make a contribution to advancing scholarly knowledge and understanding. In the next chapter I present the research findings, making use of the themes that emerged from the process of analysing the data to collate the findings.

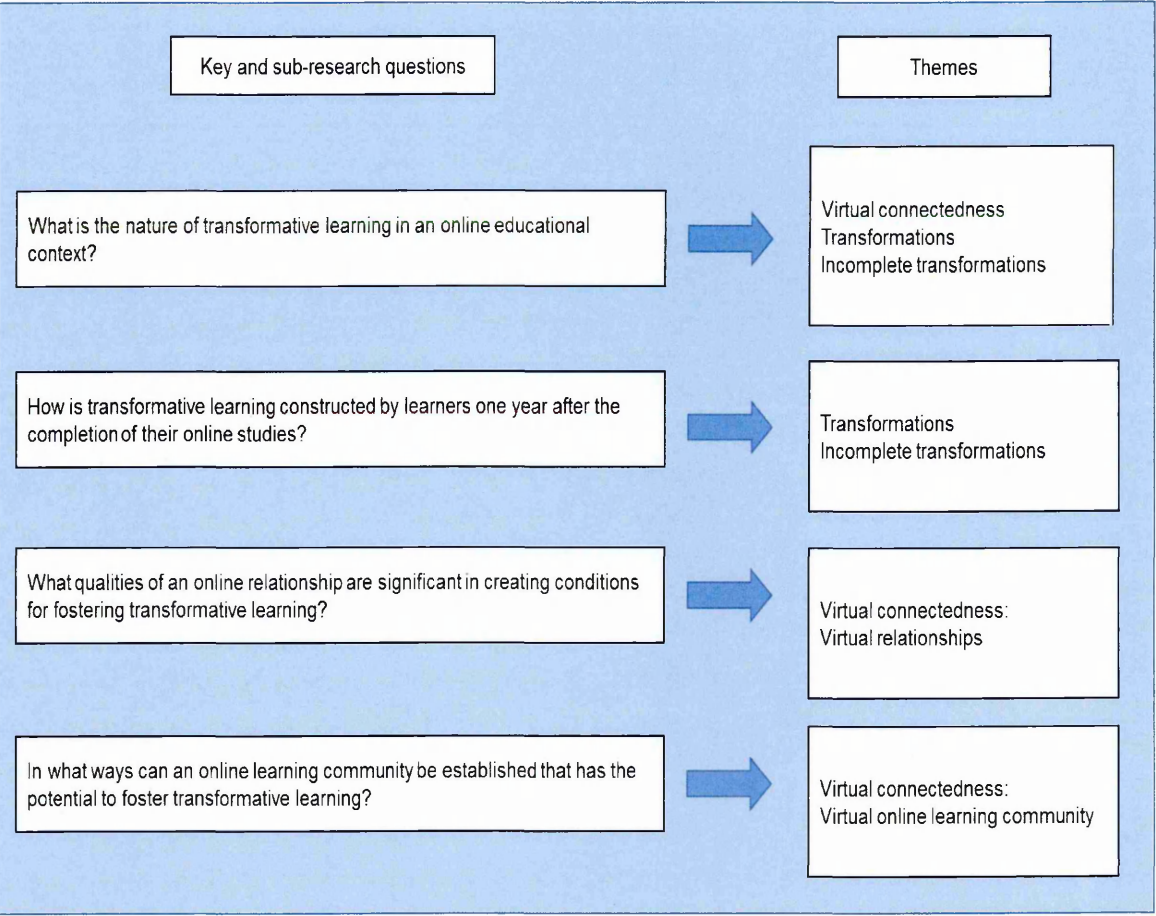
Chapter Five Presentation of Data

In order to feel the greatest sense of communication, to realize the most experience....., I want to be able to completely interact with the consciousness that's trying to communicate with mine. Rapidly....we are now creating a space in which the people of the planet can have that kind of communication relationship (Barlow et al 1995:40).

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Four I analysed the data using a hybrid thematic approach which was informed by a number of inductive as well as deductive aspects. This approach made it easier to establish connections between the research questions, the research data and the emerging themes. While it is essential to establish connections it is not my intention to constantly refer to these throughout this chapter. For the purposes of this chapter I have provided an overview of these connections in Figure 5.1. The overall structure and content of this chapter is centred on the themes and related sub-themes that emerged from my analysis of the data. I have made use of participants' voices to illuminate their experiences throughout this chapter. A brief biography for each participant can be found in Appendix F.

Figure 5.1: Connections between research questions and themes



Theme 1: Virtual connectedness

This section focuses on the theme virtual connectedness. Initially I considered the phrase ‘virtual intimacy’ but as I deepened my analysis it became apparent that this concept did not accurately represent views expressed by the participants. Kate’s words reflect the common view expressed by participants and captures the meaning of virtual connectedness:

I think what made me feel more engaged when studying online was probably the opportunity to chat with other students and be involved in group activities with others,..... I found that it helped as we could bounce ideas of each other and provide support.....I think if I had studied online and not had the support or opportunity to engage with others I may have found it

difficult and would maybe perhaps not have completed the course! (Kate, Second contact).

During the final stage of data analysis (stage 4) two sub-themes emerged related to virtual connectedness: virtual relationships and virtual learning community. Relationships are the foundation of a learning community and while linked, I felt it was necessary to present them individually. The theme virtual connectedness and associated sub-themes have links with transformative education in that they focus attention on online educational practices that have the potential to foster transformative learning. While not referring to an online context, Taylor (2008) notes that there is a greater interest in factors that shape transformative learning; relationships and learning community are two such factors. This research project offered an opportunity to explore ways in which these factors developed within BB which is the VLE used at UHI. What follows is a presentation of data related to the development of these two factors.

Virtual relationships

The role of relationships is significant in creating the conditions capable of fostering transformative learning online or in a face-to-face context, and while the more subjective qualities are often given less attention, transformative learning 'is dependent upon the need for support, trust, friendship and intimacy' (Taylor 2007:187). The process of transformative learning in a VLE is shaped by the relationships between the educator and the learner and among the learners (Cranton 2010). While it may take longer to develop virtual relationships, participants reflected positively on the potential of the VLE in assisting them to develop these relationships without being distracted by superficial visual cues often used to judge people:

As each module progresses you became familiar with people on the board and began to attach to certain people....In one way not having a face or a personality to attach to let you concentrate on the content of their posts and did not get you side tracked or make judgements on people (Lorna, Second contact follow up).

The VLE offered participants a sense of freedom that they may not have experienced in a face-to-face environment and as a result they felt more able to ask questions with little fear of being ridiculed. Eilidh noted that not seeing fellow students enabled her to feel more comfortable asking for help and allowed her to be invisible:

I felt I could ask questions no matter how silly I thought they might sound as people wouldn't know who I was....I didn't need to worry about what people might say or think. I could also hide away from people if I wanted to (Fifth contact).

While the VLE offered a space in which participants felt more comfortable asking for help, a number of participants found the lack of face-to-face contact challenging, and noted that they still judged fellow students despite the absence of visual cues. Jo found that she began to judge fellow students based on the comments they posted in the online discussion forums. Susan explored how she found it difficult to share her thoughts in the VLE:

It could be difficult to put across online what I wanted to say and the manner in which I meant it to be said – face-to-face you can see someone's body language etc. and have the opportunity to clarify things straight away (Susan, Fifth contact).

This view was shared by Shona who noted that she constantly worried that her online responses would be viewed as silly which had an impact on the relationships she developed in the VLE. Although participants' views were mixed and there were challenges, the general consensus was that it was possible to develop deep and meaningful virtual relationships, and that these relationships played a significant part in promoting a sense of connection, and had the potential to shape transformative learning:

Once I eventually got the 'hang' of communicating via the internet more, it was good to read messages and feel part of a group (experiencing the same thoughts, concerns and anxieties) (Terry, Second contact follow up).

An educational context that promotes transformative learning encourages learners to embrace and work with their edge emotions within the liminal space as described in Chapter 2 pages 28 and 29. Rena commented on how her online studies pushed her out of her comfort zone which challenged her view of herself and her role within her workplace and wider community. Participants reflected on the way in which tutors interacted with them as they worked with their edge emotions. Eilidh found it helpful when tutors didn't overcomplicate the course materials and communicated in a manner that displayed mutual regard. Charlotte commented on the value of being viewed as an equal by tutors and the importance of being able to relate to them as fellow human beings. As she explored further, Charlotte outlined the impact the relationship she developed with the course leader had on her during her studies:

I was able to push myself further and try without giving up when it got hard....I believe it was the support I received that allowed me to see things which without support I would not have understood (Charlotte, Third contact follow up).

In an attempt to foster transformative learning, the relationship between an educator and a learner based on shared authority and mutual trust is a significant factor. While education can be viewed as a primary act of care, this should not be confused with simple gestures of good will; 'simply nodding and smiling, holding and comforting' (Dalozi 1986:244). Caring requires educators to be both just and compassionate with their learners. Catriona found tutors that were thoughtful and understanding and grasped how she was feeling and thinking, which helped her to make progress in her learning but noted that their expectations were high:

The bar was raised. They pushed us students, nurtured, guided and most importantly prepared us. They made sure we were up to it and could not only pass but improve performance (Catriona, Second contact follow up).

If the occurrence of transformative learning depends, in part, on the relationship between the educator and learner, of interest to this research are the relational qualities necessary to foster this occurrence within a VLE. Reflecting on the participants' responses key qualities of a virtual transformative relationship emerged. Participants highlighted that being viewed as an individual was important and helped them to remain motivated and committed to continuing their studies:

They made you feel that as an individual you meant something to them and that you were not just a number. When things were tough going I felt I wanted to stick with it not just for myself but for them also (Shona, Second contact follow up).

Several participants commented on the significance of feeling cared for. Marea commented on the way tutors communicated, using the phrase 'personal touch', which helped her realise that they understood their students' learning journeys and

that this type of communication encouraged students not to give up. Louise noted that the support, empathy and encouragement she received from tutors helped to keep her motivated.

The relational qualities defined here by the participants as caring, support, feeling connected, being viewed as an individual demonstrated the potential of the VLE to create the conditions necessary to foster transformations. As Cranton (2005) notes, making connections with others is possible in an online context and these connections can be significant. For example, participants commented on how they struggled to let go when their studies came to an end and suffered from what they referred to as withdrawal symptoms:

This may sound strange, but when the course finished, I had a slight 'withdrawal' from going on-line each night to check messages – the 'connection' it just stopped (Terry, Second contact follow up).

Over the years I have collected similar anecdotal comments. Learners often find themselves continuing to log on to their student email and the VLE for several weeks after their course finishes. Some struggle with what they described as a sudden loss; one day they felt connected and the next day it was severed. For some the end of their studies felt like a bereavement and as a result they grieved the loss of their virtual relationships.

Virtual learning community

The development of a learning community has the potential to foster transformative learning (Palloff and Pratt 1999 and 2007). However, to realise this potential there is the assumption that the elements of a learning community can be established in a VLE. While the establishment of these elements does not guarantee transformative learning will take place, their presence can create

conditions that promote its occurrence. What follows is a presentation of data related to the development of these essential elements within the VLE used at UHI.

Developing a sense of belonging and commonality of experiences in the VLE assisted participants in feeling they were not alone in the challenges they faced during their studies. Kate discussed how she found the opportunity to communicate with fellow students online helped her to realise that she was not the only one struggling and that others shared her view. While Charlotte expressed a reluctance to engage in online discussions, choosing rather to lurk in the background, she did find being able to read other students' postings a source of support. In her discussion of the VLE, Lorna explored the significance of the online connections she developed and despite having never met face-to-face, these connections promoted a sense of belonging:

If you do post a question or declare you are struggling and someone responds you are very grateful because you know they too have taken time to read your cry for help and have responding to it, helping someone they have never met, which is quite awesome really (Second contact follow up).

Reflecting on the tools utilised in the VLE, participants noted that these helped them to feel more connected with both fellow students and tutors. Susan described how the discussion board, online videos, opportunities to take part in online synchronous chat sessions, and the online support and feedback from tutors were vitally important and helped to simulate a classroom environment. Feeling connected with others also encouraged participants to more frequently engage in online discussions. While Lorna noted that although it was daunting posting her thoughts online she found the process boosted her confidence and encouraged her to add further comments.

As participants developed their connections, this encouraged them to more honestly share their thoughts and experiences on the discussion boards and chat sessions. Lorna reflected on the importance of being honest while at the same time acknowledging the views of her fellow students:

While it was important to be considerate of others views it was equally important to be honest with your own views after all there are two sides to every argument or discussion' (Fourth contact).

As the virtual learning community became more established, participants developed a sense of belonging and this helped to create a space in which they felt safe to engage in the process of reflection. Leslie outlined the impact working with a wide variety of student and tutors had on her view of the world:

Their knowledge, opinions and personalities have broadened my outlook on the world. They were often very different from my opinions, knowledge and personality...making me think about and challenge my own opinions, knowledge and attitudes (Fourth contact).

For a number of participants the VLE offered them the opportunity to actively engage with fellow learners almost to the extent of it becoming addictive. As she discussed the positive benefits of interacting with others online Catriona described her feelings of anticipation:

I clicked on every day and last thing at night too! It was like waiting for the post, anticipation as to the next discussion point and who was posting (Second contact follow up).

Feeling connected with the online course content was viewed positively by the participants and helped them to more meaningfully engage with the materials and make links with their professional practice. Susan referred to this as her kind of

study. Palloff and Pratt (2007) refer to the importance of relevance in the creation of a virtual learning community. Being able to make links with the course content promotes a sense of being an expert and encouraged participants to share their experiences thereby enhancing the overall learning process for the group as well as the individual. While Leslie didn't encounter anything completely new on the course she did find that her theoretical knowledge base was extended and enhanced.

An essential ingredient in the development of a virtual learning community is interaction. Palloff and Pratt (2005) note that interaction reduces the potential for learner isolation. Although a few participants referred to experiencing feelings of isolation, this was often self-induced or due to a reluctance to engage with the technology primarily due to a lack of confidence. Marea reflected on how she isolated herself. While recognising the value of interacting with the online community she found it easier to stay in the background. As participants' IT skills developed, and it became easier to navigate their way around the VLE, they found the opportunity to engage in conversations assisted them to overcome feeling alone. Kate described how talking online made the experience of studying more real rather than totally virtual.

In the virtual learning community participants were separated by time and space which, they noted, enabled them to think and digest information before sharing their thoughts. This had the potential to promote a deep level of engagement and collaboration. As Lorna discussed the part other students played in her learning she noted:

As their comments are written it means you have time to read, digest and reflect on their thoughts much more than if they had just said them in a classroom environment (Second contact).

While being separated by space and time did offer participants opportunities to reflect and digest, which could potentially lead to a transformation, the social presence of fellow students and tutors was noted as a significant factor. Participants found tutors that regularly checked their emails and responded to discussion board postings promptly had a positive impact on their level of engagement in the VLE. Several participants commented positively on being separated by space and time, noting that it allowed them to control the time and pace they chose to engage with the virtual learning community, to suit their lifestyle and needs. Marea viewed online learning as flexible and accessible:

I could work when I liked so could largely set my own time table to fit in with my other commitments....how engaged I wanted to be with the on-line community.....I could access the course anywhere with internet access....(Marea, Fifth contact).

From a practical perspective without the gift of space and time participants would have found themselves unable to engage with the virtual learning community or even consider completing a Childhood Practice Degree. While learning online may not have been their preferred mode of study, participants recognised its benefits and valued the opportunity it offered them.

Theme 2: Transformations

The second theme to emerge from stage 3 of analysing the data was transformations. For the purposes of analysing the data I defined transformative learning as a process that broadly affected participants' lives; dramatically changing them as a person, thereby having an impact on their habits of being. Factors that influenced how I constructed participants' transformations are outlined in Chapter Four pages 78 and 79. I initially attempted to operationalise

participants' transformations but realised that this approach was not appropriate. Rarely did participants experience a transformation as a linear process as suggested by operationalization. It was more akin to a process of unfolding which meant it took time for the transformations to reveal themselves. During stage 4 of data analysis similarities emerged which enabled me to group participants' transformations. From this process the following sub-themes emerged: self-view, ways of being and work identity. What follows is a presentation of participants' experiences related to each sub-theme.

Self-view

Self-view is a mental relation an individual has with him/herself as they explore their self from the inside (Illeris 2007). A transformation of a self-view involves having to let go of previously held perceptions of self and therefore alters an individual's habit of being. This can be a threatening and painful experience which is often resisted. An individual will rarely experience a transformed self instantaneously. The role of social relations is significant during the transformative process. Recognising the individualistic nature of experiencing a transformed self-view the following data is presented through a vignette. What follows is Charlotte's story.

During Charlotte's studies her self-view was dramatically altered. She experienced a transformation that evoked a structural change in how she viewed herself. The relationship that Charlotte developed with the Childhood Practice course leader played a significant role in creating a space in which Charlotte felt safe to consider an alternative self-view.

From a young age Charlotte knew she was different. At school she was ridiculed or ignored by her teachers and fellow pupils. She spent most of her school life being treated like a fool:

I think the challenges I faced were getting past everything I had been told....I was thick, stupid, lazy and not worth the effort....I was told it every day of my life from a young age (Second contact follow up).

In primary school Charlotte tested positive for dyslexia but her parents were advised to say nothing as this was viewed best for Charlotte and would prevent her from being labelled throughout her schooling. When Charlotte discovered she had dyslexia at the age of twenty-one she took her first step towards considering an alternative self-view. However, her transformation did not emerge until her studies at UHI. Charlotte was attracted to the Childhood Practice Degree at UHI because it was online. This meant she didn't need to meet new people and there would be no opportunity for peer humiliation

Charlotte explored the challenges she encountered during her studies noting that she found the online resources and VLE confusing:

....lots of different roads that lead in different directions....I just stand and stare around....until I am standing in the middle of spaghetti junction (Second contact).

Throughout Charlotte's studies she was reluctant to join online chat sessions, and refused to post comments on discussion boards. Charlotte's main support throughout her studies was the course leader who was also her PAT. She spoke positively about this relationship, noting that the course leader was patient, calm and never made her feel stupid. Charlotte felt the course leader understood her:

She got the fact that the way I learnt to deal with my problems was to look at everything and avoid anything that was not clear cut....She also understood why I could not go on to chat rooms or put work on the board (Second contact).

Charlotte's self-view was associated with the following phrases 'not the brightest bulb in the box', 'thick as mince', 'stupid', 'lazy' and 'not worth the effort' (First contact, First contact follow up and Second contact). Having held this view for over thirty years, it was difficult for Charlotte to consider an alternative self-view but in her final year at UHI things began to change. For the first time Charlotte posted a piece of work on the discussion board:

Posting my work on the board was a huge step for me.....I wanted to prove I could put a bit of work up and not care if others laughed or made comments about it.....when you spend all your school life being treated like a fool you chose not to want to learn and hide when you can and posting on the board is the opposite of that (Second contact follow up).

Charlotte's experience of posting a piece of work online made her feel amazing. She was not ridiculed or made to feel stupid by her fellow students. In exploring why she took this risk Charlotte reflected on the significance of her relationship with the course leader:

It was all thanks to one lecturer that cared enough to want to help. That simple gesture changed me, it gave me confidence and pride in myself two things I had never really had (Second contact).

Charlotte's self-view was changing and this change was experienced in contexts outside of UHI:

[This] affected me forever as I was able to sit in a room with hundreds of people (something I would never do before) and then on top of that get up on stage in front of them all. All thanks to one person's kindness and understanding (Second contact).

The unique virtual relationship between Charlotte and the course leader, which was based on trust, compassion, warmth, genuine regard, caring and empathy, created a space in which Charlotte felt safe to take a risk. This enabled her to experience a transformed self-view. A self-view which Charlotte embraced after her studies at UHI came to an end:

My view of the world has changed....I no longer see myself as a waste of space as I have achieved something that others see as important (Fourth contact).

In altering her self-view, Charlotte had transformed her habit of being; she experienced a subjective reframing. However, her transformation was not instantaneous. Charlotte still needs time to embody her altered self-view:

When I finished the course I had to start thinking about myself differently I could no longer believe what I had been told all my life as now I had proof that I wasn't thick; I have a degree. This was hard for me to believe but I am getting better (Fifth contact).

It can take time to fully embrace a transformation. While there was evidence that suggested other participants experienced an altered self-view, I was unable to construct the transformative process and therefore their experiences were viewed as incomplete transformations. I explore these later in this chapter. Although the process of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI triggered Charlotte's transformation, of interest to this research project was the significance of the

relationship she developed with the course leader. I was particularly interested in the relational qualities and how these created the conditions that enabled Charlotte to experience a transformation. I explore this further in Chapter Six.

Ways of being

Ways of being is defined here as the inner world of participants; it profoundly affects 'how a person affectively experiences life, how they physically and emotionally react to experiences, and how they exist in the world' (Hoggan 2014:12). During their experiences of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree, a number of participants became more aware of their inner world. As these participants tuned into their inner world the potential to become more aware of their role in the outer world was realised and as a result they experienced a transformation. What follows are the stories of participants whose ways of being were transformed.

Terry's story

During Terry's email interview she reflected on old anxieties reappearing during her studies due to being openly excluded from a study group formed locally by other Managers who were also undertaking the degree at UHI. She found it interesting to rediscover these old feelings of insecurities and rejection and began to question why she was being excluded. Terry refers to these old anxieties as old spooks:

These old spooks may have manifested because I was studying again and feelings may have got mixed by my old experiences of school, studying and what I was emotionally carrying around from my younger years (Second contact).

As Terry's email interview progressed she continued to reflect on the impact these old spooks were having on her during her studies. She described reliving previous educational experiences and how this exposed internal fears:

[A] feeling a failure and 'being found out' that I'm not 'good enough' to be in the position of a Manager academically (Second contact follow up).

Terry noted that with support from her family and an acceptance of the situation she resolved the situation and was able to let go. She realised that she would need to find support from other sources. As Terry continued to explore her experience of letting go she noted the following:

[It] is all about working through – I'm not a teenager anymore and my experiences of family support and love is very different now....It's amazing how I thought I had 'moved on' from difficult experiences and life gives you different life choices that may 'touch' dormant or suppressed emotions (Second contact follow up).

Flora's story

During Flora's email interview she reflected on her changing view of her role in her workplace. She had been a nursery assistant for so long that she found it challenging to separate what she referred to as her personas: 'me Flora as a friend, mum, wife and me, Flora the educator' (Second contact follow up). Before embarking on the degree, Flora viewed her role as someone who simply played in the nursery. However, during her studies she began to question the relevance of the setting in which she was employed and her role in this setting. Flora notes this was not 'a crisis of 'why do I exist?' But a thought of why I was here? and why does it matter?' (Fourth contact) Her concern with why it mattered had been buried under family obligation and the security of being under the supervision of a

teacher. The triggers of her children growing up and policy changes which removed teachers from the nursery, which coincided with her degree studies, made Flora ask the question – ‘what is the point of me?’.

Flora’s inner reflections coincide with what she referred to as troubling times. She described the experience of studying like being on a carousel. It threw her off balance and left her feeling like her life resembled a merry-go-round. She would lie awake at night with sudden insights or phrases. Her lack of sleep increased as assessment deadlines neared and she began to write essays in her dreams and thoughts. She felt disorganised all the time:

The pile of books and notes, scraps of paper and highlighter pens in the living room corner could have been a metaphor for how my brain worked during the entire time of studying (Second contact follow up).

As Flora completed assessments for the research and contemporary issues modules she found herself struggling to identify how she fitted into the role of an educator. This process triggered a deepened level of inner reflection:

There’s not just me in the nursery. There is not just a group of children playing....There is not just my colleagues having a jolly time alongside me. There is a learning environment that is facilitated and managed by a person who recognises the values and the effect such a learning environment has on the generations of children who attend. That person is me (Third contact).

Flora notes that studying the degree opened up what was already inside her and gave her courage and self-respect. Towards the end of her studies Flora presented a talk entitled ‘Finding a Voice’ at the first Childhood Practice

Conference held in Glasgow on 1st March 2011. This proved to be a significant event for Flora:

It was a powerful moment for me, encapsulating everything that had happened to me in heart, mind, body and soul as a result of the degree in changing me from a nursery assistant to a professional (Fifth contact).

Flora reflects on how her studies have given her the courage and confidence to believe that she can make a difference to other professionals within the childhood practice profession, which she notes would not have been possible without the degree:

For the first time, it was clear that I had choices to make in pursuing a move to another aspect of the Early Years [sector], namely informing, nurturing, supporting and training new students and candidates to the profession (Fifth contact).

Marea's story

In her responses to the third set of email interview questions Marea started to explore a connection between her inner and outer world. While she was studying the contemporary issues module Marea found herself reflecting on ways in which her values/views/beliefs influenced her professional practice. She noted that these were formed from experience and were often just accepted without being carefully considered. Marea began to reflect upon the institution of marriage and the changing role of women. She started to realise that while the government proclaimed the nuclear family as the norm/ideal, this was probably an unrealistic aspiration and not the reality for a large proportion of families.

Marea noted that her own upbringing, within a traditional nuclear family, led her to naively internalise the belief that this model was ultimately the best. Even when

she became a single parent she still held onto this belief. Marea noted that it was only during her studies did she begin to realise that there was and always had been a myriad of family makeups. This led Marea to reflect on whether she had always known this but had never really assimilated it. This was the beginning of Marea's transformed way of being. Marea began to question if subconsciously she treated the families in her care differently based on their family configuration. She experienced internal conflict which she referred to as a personal battle. She felt that she had failed her own children and considered whether her idealised view of a nuclear family had led her to view all other family configurations as 'bad'. Marea posed the question: 'Do I have a subconscious scale of what is good/bad/acceptable/non-acceptable?'. While she acknowledged that she did not have the answer to this question she claimed that:

The very fact that I question my beliefs and values helps me to be more open and evaluating...it is healthy to challenge our thinking and question why we believe a certain thing and look at how that belief influences how we are and how we act... (Third contact).

While unique, Terry, Flora and Marea's stories share a common outcome – their ways of being were transformed. As Terry, Flora and Marea reflected on their inner worlds they became more aware of their role in the outer world. In order to resolve the disparity between their inner and outer worlds they had to overcome the situational, emotional and informational constraints (Mezirow 2012). Only then did they experience a transformation and as a result they were able to move forward. In overcoming the constraints Terry, Flora and Marea demonstrated the will and insight to change and also the inner power to take action. Although Flora has made the decision to take action, she is currently unable to pursue this decision due to economic circumstances; she is unable to leave her current

workplace without alternative employment in place. Flora has negotiated to lessen her hours within her current workplace and has recently secured a part-time temporary position within an FE college. If this position is made permanent Flora will then be faced with the decision to take action.

Work identity

While undertaking a Childhood Practice degree participants' work identity became closely integrated with their learner identity. In doing so the process of learning enabled participants to transform their work identity. Participants began to value their work and view themselves as professional practitioners. These changes coincided with significant policy changes with regard to removing teachers from childhood practice settings and rising qualification requirements for childhood practice staff employed within the private and voluntary sectors, with leadership or supervisory responsibilities. What follows is a presentation of the changes participants experienced in relation to their work identity. As these changes were experienced by a number of participants I have presented their voices in collaboration rather than individually.

Historically the childhood practice workforce has been under-valued, often being viewed as 'women's work'; an easy job that could be done by anyone. Participants upheld this view as they reflected on their work identity prior to undertaking a childhood practice degree:

The clue is in my title- nursery assistant – early years workers were simply some people with a wee qualification that liked working with children but was really an assistant to the real professional – the teacher'.....The workforce was not a profession and at times it felt like an underclass.

There was no respect for me and this was vice-versa as I did not have respect for it either (Flora, First contact follow up).

While they found it challenging to identify positive aspects related to their work identity, participants were committed to and passionate about their career choice:

[I] marvelling at how children learn and develop; enjoying watching the fun and dynamics; and loving the sense that I had responsibility for offering some positive opportunities in their day – very satisfying and motivating (Kathleen, First contact).

Kathleen's view is in line with research that shows that the childhood practice workforce is personally committed to their job, making considerable emotional investment (Osgood 2004). However, despite their personal commitment to the children and families they worked with, participants did not view their career choice as a profession in line with other established professions. In part this view could be attributed to the historical alignment of the childhood practice workforce with the role of mothering, which acts to disempower the workforce from claiming professional status (Dalli 2001). During their studies as participants' learner and work identities integrated, changes began to emerge. Participants began to experience a growing sense of self-worth, personal value and confidence which had an impact on their work identity; they began to view themselves as professional practitioners. They no longer associated themselves as someone who simply played with children, they belonged to a professional body:

The modules I followed realised my belief in the importance of me, that there is a national and global community....I feel confident to belong to....I am now a professional when before I was simply a person who played in

nursery. There is no chance this would have happened before the [degree] (Flora, Fourth contact).

Participants shared a view that obtaining a degree raised the profile of the childhood practice workforce. They were viewed as equals by other professionals, something they had not experienced prior to undertaking a childhood practice degree:

Before the [degree] I often felt other professionals viewed me as just someone from the private sector who just cared for children.....During the [degree] other professionals began to ask my opinion.....After the [degree] I have a much better rapport with the Local Authority teachers and health specialists who know I have done a degree (Shona, Fourth contact).

The changing views of other professionals is of interest to this research project and merits further exploration. As Flora reflected on her transformed work identity which changed from feeling like a novice and a follower to being a leader, she uses the phrase 'power' on several occasions. The power that she had as an individual and the power the childhood practice sector could potentially have. While acknowledging that her transformed work identity may have emerged without undertaking a degree Flora notes that 'the power and professionalism would not have been recognised by other professionals' (Fourth contact follow up). Participants' transformed work identity was closely associated with successfully completing a degree. This poses an interesting conundrum. Why did the views of other professionals change? Was it due to the level of study the participants had achieved, or could it be attributed to the internal changes within the graduates which then had an impact on how they were perceived by, and interacted with, other professionals? What we do know is that when a person experiences a transformation it shapes them; 'they are different afterward, in ways both they and

others recognize' (Clark 1993:47). However, the reasons for the changing views of other professionals remains unclear. Participants did note that other professionals often did not value their opinions until they engaged them in discourse:

....often this does not happen until I start speaking to other professionals and they hear and respond to a well-informed, articulate and equally confident and competent professional (Flora, Third contact).

This supports the view that the change was in part due to the changes within the participants which then affected how they interacted with other professionals which then altered how they were perceived. This was further supported by Shona:

I feel that I am more assertive than I was before starting studying. Other professionals do seem to have more respect and I am very happy to take the lead in areas (Third contact).

It is clear that participants experienced a transformation in relation to their work identity and the process of this transformation was closely linked with participants' changing learner identity which could ultimately impact their self-identity. It is the interplay of all three identities and the resulting transformative outcomes which has the potential to affect social change regarding the status of the childhood practice workforce.

Theme 3: Incomplete transformations

During stage 3 of the data analysis process examples of what I defined as incomplete transformations emerged. The factors that influenced how I constructed participants' transformations are outlined in Chapter Four pages 78 and 79. Incomplete transformations did not dramatically alter the way the

participants experienced, conceptualized or interacted with the world; that is, the learning did not result in the participants experiencing a qualitatively different way of being. While some examples fostered changes that could be defined as significant developmental moments and demonstrated a potential to transform, I was unable to construct the transformative process and so they were defined as incomplete. The final stage of data analysis gave rise to three sub-themes related to incomplete transformations: attitudinal, developing knowledge and understanding, and behavioural. What follows is a presentation of participants' incomplete transformations related to each sub-theme. As the participants' experiences of incomplete transformations were often connected I have drawn on the voices of several participants to present the data.

Attitudinal

Attitudinal change refers to participants experiencing an altered way of thinking or feeling which emerged during their degree studies; that is, a change in their manner or disposition which often had an emotional or social dimension. For example, Shona noted that undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree had increased her confidence and made her more assertive. Lorna reflected on the challenges of degree level study and her growing fear of failure. She referred to her learning journey like climbing Everest and felt her achievement had more meaning as a mature student studying, as well as holding down a job and running a family. When asked to describe how completing a Childhood Practice Degree had affected her, Lorna noted the following attitudinal changes:

Not a day passes when I don't think about how it has changed me. I am more confident, ready to challenge.....I now question everything I do, evaluate and reflect. I am now much more interested in why we do something and read research with a more discerning eye (Fourth Contact).

While it could be suggested that Shona and Lorna's habits of being had changed and that these attitudinal changes had the potential to affect how they experienced life they were not deemed as transformative. Although Lorna had developed a different attitude, a new outlook on life, this alone is not indicative of a transformation (Dirkx 2012). Lorna's reference to climbing Everest is significant in that it suggests a dramatic change but what is not possible to establish is evidence that supports the journey up the mountain; that is the transformative process. Lorna's experiences could be viewed as an example of empowered learning, perhaps even life-altering but I did not define them as transformative.

As I explored attitudinal changes in more detail a number of recurring outcomes emerged. Including Shona, sixteen of the participants made reference to feeling more confident as a result of their studies. Several noted that their confidence had developed both personally and professionally. Marea referred to her studies as giving her more self-belief and Janet described the impact as boosting her self-worth. Linda noted that her studies developed her self-esteem. Six of the participants chose the word proud to describe how they felt having completed a degree. While it could be suggested that these attitudinal changes had the potential to affect how the participants experienced life and alter their self-view, it is rather more challenging to establish whether these changes were transformative.

In an attempt to construct the transformative process I identified a number of changes related to these attitudinal outcomes. Eilidih felt that her growing confidence helped making decisions about her life easier and also enabled her to successfully secure a senior position. Louise was contemplating applying for Primary Teaching and both Jo and Flora were considering leaving their role working with young children. Susan described how her growing confidence

enabled her to become a more reflective practitioner and Michelle noted that she was now able to voice her opinion when she believed something was not appropriate. However, for these changes to be considered transformative they would have to lead the participants to fundamentally question and reorder how they think and act. While these attitudinal outcomes were significant, in my view they could be defined as the softer outcomes of education: 'improved confidence self-esteem and motivation, which help to evoke new levels of self-understanding' (Wilson and Train 2006:2). They were therefore not defined as transformative.

Developing knowledge and understanding

As the participants completed their studies their knowledge and understanding of theoretical and practical aspects related to the field of childhood practice and their technological competence developed. These developments or changes were viewed as examples of incomplete transformations. Reflecting the views of several participants, Kathleen noted how studying an online degree developed her IT skills:

Being online helped me to become much more computer literate both because I had to, and because I spent so much more time at it that I improved (Fifth contact).

There was a shared view amongst the participants that the content of the degree added breadth and depth to their existing knowledge and understanding and that this enabled them to look at their practice in far more detail than before. For example, Lorna noted that the content of the degree made her more aware of the importance of early attachments; Louise's understanding of the concept of inclusion developed; and Michelle became more aware of the value of team work and the importance of sharing information. Other examples mentioned related to

the benefits of working in partnership with external agencies and parents, the value of an integrated way of working and a more detailed understanding of policy, legislation and current initiatives and how these could be realised in practice. Marea viewed her studies as validating the knowledge and skills she had developed.

A number of participants explored ways in which their developing knowledge and understanding altered their view of their workplace which led to feelings of frustration. Kathleen became more aware of how her workplace was poorly managing its main assets, the staff, and as a result there were a number of wasted opportunities. Jo described how her workplace was not impressed when she shared examples from her studies and Michelle referred to her sense of annoyance when she witnessed issues not being dealt with in an appropriate manner.

While participants' developing knowledge and understanding can be identified as examples of changes, and did have an effect on the how they viewed their professional practice and their workplace, I did not define them as complete transformations. The changes did not alter the participants' habits of being but rather broadened their existing knowledge base; that is, their studies added to and expanded their knowledge and understanding. This is supported by Brookfield (2000:143) who notes 'understanding better the nuances and multiple realities of an idea or practice does not....deserve to be called transformative'. If the participants had shared more detail in relation to the depth of the changes they experienced it may have been possible to construct the transformative process. As proposed by Mezirow (2012) for a change to be identified as transformative, participants' practice or knowledge and understanding would have to significantly change based on their revised viewpoints or remain the same, based on reasoned

affirmation of existing practice; that is, there would have to be an informed and reflective decision to alter their practice or keep the same based on their reflective insight. As I was unable to construct the level of reflection noted here by Mezirow, the examples of change related to developing knowledge and understanding were viewed as incomplete transformations.

Behavioural

Behavioural changes refer to examples where participants experienced an altered way of acting or conducting themselves which emerged as a result of undertaking their studies. These changes were often intertwined with participants' attitudinal and developing knowledge and understanding changes. For example, Kathleen, Louise, Michelle, Susan and Eilidh all described how their growing confidence and developing knowledge enabled them to more often speak out in their workplace and also in their work with external agencies:

Beforehand I would not have had the confidence to challenge others and would have went with the flow. After doing the degree I feel I now have the confidence to speak up for myself and for service users (Louise, Fourth contact).

Shona reflected on how her studies enabled her to take her ideas forward and stand up for what she believed was right. While she still had to fight to find her voice having completed a Childhood Practice Degree, it gave her the confidence she needed. Leslie found her new confidence enabled her to bring fresh enthusiasm and motivation to her workplace and a desire to share her new knowledge and ideas with her fellow colleagues. Louise discussed how her studies had helped her in the workplace to adopt a more laid back approach and not become so stressed about day to day challenges which could be easily

discussed and addressed. Lorna spoke about her growing confidence encouraging her to question everything and fuelling her with a desire to provoke this type of reflective practice in others. Lorna does begin to display a level of reflection which suggested a transformation. She posed questions which indicated depth of thinking: 'Why was I doing something? What could I do better next time? (Third contact). However, while this thinking does signify a potential to transform with no tangible evidence to support this way of thinking I have not defined it as transformative.

A number of participants noted ways in which their studies promoted behavioural changes in their personal lives. Michelle described how her studies had helped her to reflect on time management issues and as a result made her more aware of what was important and what could be left undone for another day. She also noted that she had become more understanding and valuing of other people's opinions. Flora spoke about overlaps into her personal life mentioning specifically that her studies had positively affected her parenting skills and encouraged her to become a more active listener. While these more personal behavioural changes had an impact on the participants' lives and their interactions with others they were not defined as examples of transformative learning.

As I reflected in more detail on the examples I defined as incomplete transformations, I began to identify connections with participants' experiences of transformative learning. In particular a connection with participants' transformed work identity. As participants' confidence grew they began to value themselves both personally and professionally (attitudinal change). This change occurred in parallel with participants' developing knowledge and understanding as well as related behavioural changes. While I have identified these as examples of incomplete transformations it was the combination of all three changes that

created the conditions capable of fostering a transformation. Marea used the phrase 'validated' and Flora referred to 'power'. The experience of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree enabled the participants to feel a sense of 'power', it enabled them to value themselves as a group of individuals and acted to validate them as a professional body. While on their own the examples of incomplete transformations may not have altered the participants' habits of being, when there was an interplay between all three, they had the potential to foster transformative learning.

Conclusion

In line with my review of the literature my research findings point to the potential of the online context as a space capable of fostering transformative learning. The creation of this space relies on the development of relationships and the creation of a learning community. A number of relational qualities were identified: trust, respect, empathy, recognition, support and social presence. It was the development of these relational qualities that enabled the creation of a learning community and as a result promoted the establishment of the essential elements of this community. The relational qualities were therefore the foundation on which the learning community was based; that is, they were the 'glue' that connected the participants. While human interactivity created the conditions to foster transformative learning, the online technology was a significant enabler. I also believe, based on my research, that the online context may suit the needs of non-traditional learners better.

My research findings also support a more unified perspective of transformative learning as presented in Chapter Two, one that acknowledges the emotional and social dimensions and recognises multiple ways of knowing. The transformations described in this chapter are more in line with the broader landscape of

transformative learning. Ways in which undertaking a course of study can connect with the inner world of learners which acts to foster incidental transformations. The significance of others and the role they play in promoting a transformation was also identified. In particular the importance of being valued, respected and treated as an equal a personal as well as a professional level. While classed as incomplete transformations, when there was an interplay between all three, it was found that they had the potential to foster a transformation. In the next chapter I address the research questions through an examination of central issues that emerged from analysing the data.

Chapter Six Discussion

Introduction

....transformative learning can be fostered in an online environment in the same way that it is fostered in any educational environment - through meaningful interactions among learners in which people feel free to express divergent points of view and feel supported and challenged by their peers and their teacher (Cranton 2010:8).

As outlined in Chapter One, the rationale for this research project centred on three aspects: my interest in transformative learning, the experiences of non-traditional learners who completed a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI and the online educational context. This rationale led to the following set of research questions:

Key research question:

What is the nature of transformative learning in an online educational context?

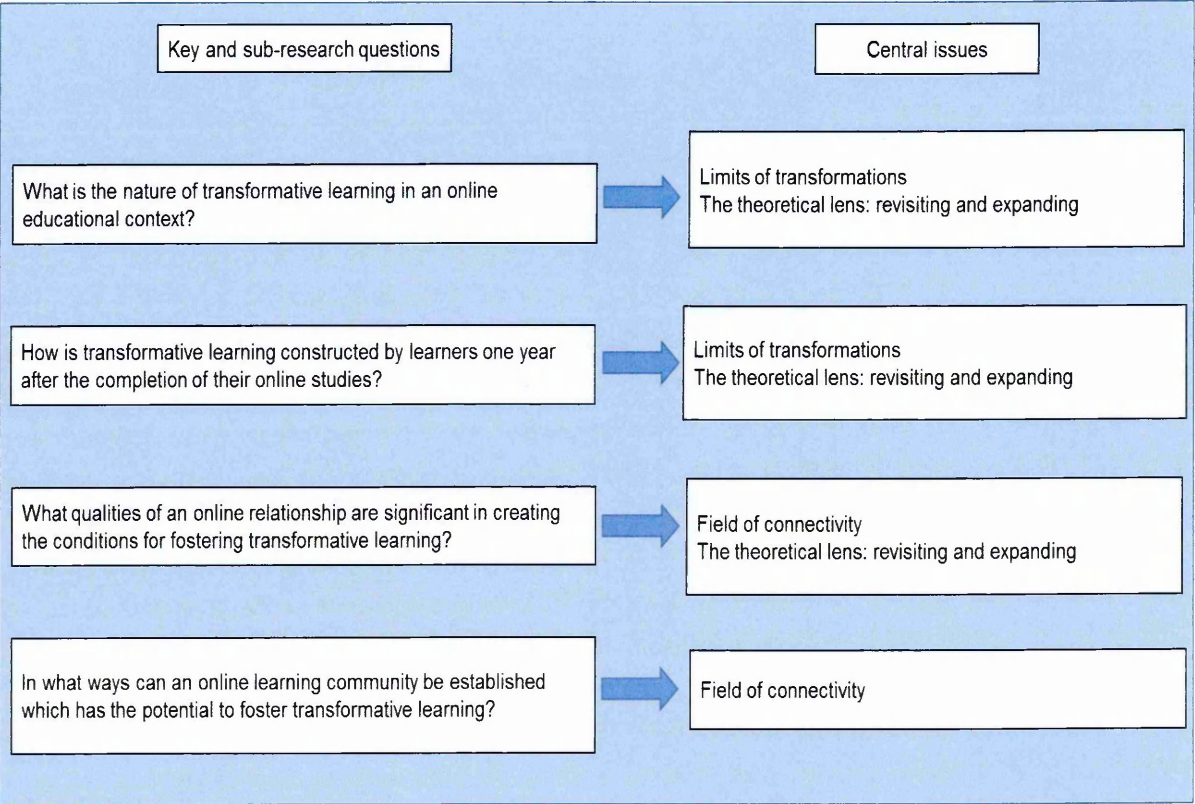
Sub-questions:

- How is transformative learning constructed by learners one year after the completion of their online studies?
- What qualities of an online relationship are significant in creating the conditions for fostering transformative learning?
- In what ways can an online learning community be established which has the potential to foster transformative learning?

The aim of this chapter is to address these research questions through an examination of central issues that emerged from analysing the data. I have collated these central issues under the following three headings: Limits of transformations, The theoretical lens: revisiting and expanding and Field of connectivity.

Connections between research questions and central issues are displayed in figure 6.1.

6.1: Connections between issues emerging from data and research questions



Limits of transformations

As I examined the research data, a number of issues emerged which I categorised as limits of transformations. First, I faced challenges in constructing a participant’s transformative process. Second, who was best placed to construct participants’ transformations and third, it became apparent that a central focus for my research was incidental transformations; that is, they did not form part of the Childhood Practice Degree’s curricular aims. This presented challenges in trying to establish the nature of transformative learning. There follows an exploration of these issues.

As outlined in Chapter Four, during stage 3 of the data analysis process I initially attempted to operationalise participants’ transformations but realised that this did not reflect their experiences or the concepts emerging from my review of the

literature. While the significant phases of transformative learning informed my thinking, rarely did participants' experiences directly correlate with the phases. I therefore faced a challenge in constructing participants' transformations. In Chapter Four page 78, I noted that a transformation was only viewed as complete if I was able to construct the process; that is, how participants travelled to the outcome, what led them there and what the contributing factors were. In their research on transformative learning Boyer *et al* (2006:356) developed an operationalised criteria based on the significant phases in their attempt to capture what they referred to as a 'full transformation'. In doing so only those instances where participants experienced all significant phases within one thematic area, was a full transformation deemed to have occurred. In her research on the occurrence of perspective transformation in an online context, Benson *et al* (2001) notes that the phases of transformative learning should be viewed as prescriptive rather than descriptive. If viewed as prescriptive, online courses could be specifically designed around the phases and therefore create learning environments conducive to fostering transformative learning.

While constructing participants' transformations may have been made easier by applying an operationalised criteria or by viewing the phases as prescriptive, I questioned if this would meaningfully capture their experiences; participants' transformations did not fit into discrete phases. Although it was often possible to identify a disorientating dilemma there were difficulties encountered in trying to establish examples of participants engaging in other significant phases. Operationalising the process would, in my view, ignore the complexity and inherent challenges participants experienced as they encountered a transformation. The factors that influenced how I constructed participants' transformations are outlined in Chapter 4 pages 78 and 79. I viewed participants' transformative experiences as more akin to an unfolding process, a slow realisation of a change which had

emotional and social dimensions. Although Mezirow (1990) claims that the experience of a transformation can be an emotionally threatening process, he fails to explore the connections between the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions and therefore, I believe, his view is not reflected in the transformations experienced by participants in this research project. I propose that the work of Dirkx (1997, 2001 and 2006a) and Jordi (2011) and their focus on learners' soul, imagination, emotion, memory and intuition offer a more satisfying perspective which is more in line with participants' experiences as I constructed them. This can be seen in Charlotte's experience of a transformed self-view, Terry, Flora and Marea's transformed ways of being and other participants' transformed work identity.

The manner in which I constructed participants' transformations may have inadvertently enacted what Featherstone and Kelly (2007:279) define as 'a hierarchical valuing'. The idea that only transformative learning in its purest form is valuable and significant. This raises a significant issue – who was best placed to construct participants' transformations? Participants' transformations were unique to them and while not assuming that I was best placed, I interpreted their transformations based on my constructs rather than theirs. The decision to apply my constructs was based on the following factors:

- the participants may not have been consciously aware of experiencing a transformation;
- my assumption that participants' knowledge of transformative learning was limited and;
- the interview questions did not explicitly refer to transformative learning.

My decision was also informed by my constructivist epistemological stance; that is, truth and meaning are constructed not discovered (James and Busher 2009). Therefore, constructing the transformations was co-owned by both participants and

myself as the researcher. I maintained the integrity of the participants' stories but applied my constructs in defining their transformations. This was reflected in my research methodology and the hybrid thematic analysis approach I adopted. As a qualitative researcher I recognised that it was not possible to separate my own theoretical orientation from the process of constructing participants' transformations and acknowledged that another researcher may apply different constructs and as a result, derive alternative conclusions.

As I examined the data and reflected on the ways in which I constructed participants' transformations I realised that what they were experiencing was by definition an incidental transformation. This was to be expected, given transformative learning was not the primary curricular aim of the Childhood Practice Degree, but was something I had not fully considered prior to undertaking my research. While this did not diminish their value or significance, the nature of the transformation was more challenging to establish as I was often unable to clearly identify what triggered the process. For participants the experience of undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree may itself trigger a transformation; that is, the experience may act as the catalyst. Kasworm (2008:28) refers to the experience of studying as 'a complex and treacherous journey that supports but may also diminish' learners' sense of identity. While it would be ethically questionable to force learners to transform, the potential is significant as learners embark on this treacherous journey. However, it would also be ethically questionable not to make learners aware of potential transformations. This could pose challenges. Firstly, it would not be possible or appropriate to identify potential incidental transformations, and secondly, if transformative learning did form part of the course learning objectives would learners, if given the choice, actively pursue the experience? (Taylor and Laros 2014).

The theoretical lens: revisiting and expanding

I feel it is necessary to first acknowledge my intellectual debt to Mezirow. Initially Mezirow's transformative learning theory was viewed as my satisfying theory however as my relationship with his work deepened and my reading widened I became concerned with his over emphasis of cognitive rationalism. As a result I found myself drawn to a more unified perspective of the theory as presented in Chapter Two. Also a unified perspective more accurately reflected how I constructed participants' transformations. As I examined the data in more detail I began to distance myself even further from transformative learning theory, seeking out alternative perspectives that would offer a more satisfying theory; a theory that would deepen my understanding of the process of transformative learning. While there was no intention to undertake a theory-building exercise there was a purposeful intention to expand my theoretical lens. In the following two sections I revisit and expand the theoretical lens. To avoid repeating data presented in the previous chapter I have, where possible, used the voices of different participants to support my discussion.

Transformations: nurturing a learner's soul

Exploring the ways in which I constructed participants' transformations I found myself returning to the writings of Dirkx. According to Dirkx (1997:80) transformative learning involves 'very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, grounded in a more intuitive and emotional sense of our experiences'. As participants progressed in their studies they found themselves engaged in a dialogue with emotionally laden issues which revealed unconscious dilemmas. As Terry noted: 'these old spooks may have manifested because I was studying again' (Second contact). Dirkx (2006a) refers to the unconscious as a shadowy inner world, that part which often reveals itself unexpectedly. As participants engaged with their shadowy inner world

there was an interaction between this world and their outer world which enabled them to make sense of their experiences and opened a window for a potential transformation. Engaging with their shadows was not part of the curricular objectives and therefore their transformed ways of being were incidental transformations.

Dirkx (2010) claims that learners need to accept their shadows, learn to 'romance' them. As participants were pushed out of their comfort zone into a liminal space, they experienced a growing edge of knowing (Berger 2004). This proved to be a troubling process for several participants. For example, Flora began to question 'what is the point of me?'. Experiencing a growing edge of knowing can be uncomfortable and therefore there is the urge to either hold on to old ways of being or embrace the 'edge emotions' which offers the potential to transform (Malkki 2010:49). The central aim is to resume a sense of stability. Once participants exited the liminal space they needed time to fully embrace their transformation. Malkki and Green (2014:15) refer to this process as 'a kind of ontological or existential shock' noting that it can take some time for 'one's conceptual understanding to "catch up" and align with this new modality'. Lorna still finds herself smiling when she reflects on achieving a degree: 'it never ceases to amaze me how chuffed I am with my own achievement' (Third contact).

Dirkx (2006b:128) advocates that adult educators need 'to restore the *soul* to the world of education'. Transformative learning is not merely the process of meeting a course objective, achieving a certain grade or meeting the expectations of a board of examiners. While these are relevant and relate to aspects of the outer world of learning, the landscape of learning is made more vivid and alive as learners become more aware of, and work with, their inner world (Dirkx 2010). Adult educators need to be mindful of learners' biographies, their culture, their stories and ways in which

these offer rich territory for incidental transformations. However, there are a number of issues to consider here. First, educators may not be aware of the occurrence of incidental transformations, which therefore limits the support they are able to offer learners as they work through the liminal space. Second, learners may choose not to publically share their incidental transformations, particularly if a safe space has not been created which legitimises non-rational learning experiences. Third, there is an assumption that learners would have the developmental capacity to engage with their inner world. This would be less of a cognitive capacity but rather the capacity to embrace alternative ways of knowing. Fourth, learners may choose not to engage with their inner world and fifth, educators may feel they are not best placed to support learners as they work through their liminal space.

If fostering transformative learning is not viewed as a central curricular aim it becomes challenging for adult educators to support the process, as well as create the conditions which have the potential to foster a transformation. In my view, for learning to be meaningful it should involve learners reflecting on their life experiences during the sense making process. Educators therefore need to be more mindful of the potential for incidental transformations. However, if educators care for and nurture the presence of learners' souls, thereby creating opportunities for transformations, these transformations may no longer be incidental but would rather be viewed as part of the broader landscape of learning which would inform the course learning objectives and curricular aims.

Transformations: changes in a learner's identity

Illeris (2014b) notes that Dirkx's focus on the soul attaches too much weight to the emotional and unconscious dimensions. As outlined in Chapter Two page 25, Illeris defines transformative learning as all learning that signifies a change in the identity of the learner. The concept of identity focuses attention on both the self and the

personality; that is, how participants experienced themselves as well as how they were experienced by others (Illeris 2007). As participants entered the world of online academia they encountered experiences which presented opportunities for them to construct alternative identities and in doing so experience a transformation. Field (2012:10) notes that 'studenthood' can be understood as a period of 'transitional identity' and encourages consideration of both the biographical and social dimensions associated with the transitional process. Links can be made here with Berger's (2004:338) concept of 'liminal space' as outlined in Chapter Two page 28. During their studies, participants entered a space in which they experienced an interplay between their self, learner and work identities. In my view it was this interplay that had the potential to foster a transformation. Marea articulated an example of this interplay:

I started from a position of feeling really disempowered, where I felt a failure....I believed that I was good at my job but my academic marks did not bear this out so it made me feel insecure and inferior....I was frightened that I would fail the course and lose my job....[as I started] to get better marks this increased my confidence....I began to believe I could do it....I began to have a bit more self-belief....the qualification [was] an endorsement of my right and ability to be a manager (Fifth contact).

Other examples of this interplay materialised as participants' incomplete transformations collaborated to foster potential transformations. For example, when participants' attitudinal and behavioural changes combined, this had the potential to transform their self-identity which in turn could affect the way in which they conducted themselves both personally and professionally.

We can define participants' self-identity as how they looked at themselves from the inside which was not necessarily based on the truth but rather on a subjective

perception of their life story (Illeris 2007). Similar to Charlotte's story, a number of participants reflected on their negative experiences of secondary school and explored how this had affected their self-identity:

I have always worried about my academic ability, therefore I thought the thought of aiming for a [Degree]....was truly out of my reach and I felt the dread of participating (Terry, First contact follow up).

Based on his experiences as an adult educator Cohen (1997:63) refers to learners living 'crouched and distorted' under a 'low-expectation ceiling'. This concept can be applied to many of the participants in this research project. Their life experiences and biographies acted as filters through which they defined their self-identity but as Illeris (2007) suggests these filters were not necessarily based on truth and therefore it was possible for participants to construct an alternative self-identity and in doing so experience a transformation. For example, Eilidh described being surrounded by people who constantly told her she would not succeed academically and noted how she began to internalise this view. However, during her studies Eilidh began to construct an alternative view which enabled her to erode her low expectation ceiling: 'I was more confident in myself and my abilities. I was proud of myself and my achievements' (Fifth contact). Eilidh experienced an interplay between her self, learner and work identities. As she passed each assessment, her confidence grew and her knowledge base expanded which had a positive impact on her work identity which eventually led her to securing a senior position:

[The Degree] gave me confidence in what I was doing....confidence in using what I had learned....I felt I had more knowledge[and] was more reflective in my work....if I hadn't completed the degree I don't think I would have gone for the job (Fourth and Fifth contact).

As employed childhood practitioners, participants' work identity formed a significant part of their central identity and sent important information, internally and externally, about their status in society (Kammeyer-Mueller *et al* 2008). During their studies participants' work identity became entangled with their self and learner identities which fostered a transformation. As a direct result of their studies, participants' knowledge and understanding expanded which promoted a growing sense of confidence, self-esteem and professional pride. They no longer viewed themselves as an underclass, they were professionals who formed part of a defined professional body. The outcome of their transformed work identity was twofold: it evoked changes in how participants viewed themselves within their work role and also altered their perception of how other professionals regarded them. What was less clear was what triggered participants' work identity to transform. I explore the relational nature of transformative learning in the next section as I expand the theoretical lens.

As I continued to examine the data I found myself seeking out alternative theoretical perspectives in order to develop a deeper understanding of the process of transformative learning experienced by participants. It was at this point that I began to widen my reading beyond the field of transformative learning. I was interested in the relational nature of transformative learning. For example, Marea used the phrase personal touch as she reflected on tutors who had an impact on her studies. Both Eilidh and Janet discussed the relationships they had with their PAT and the course leader, noting that it was their support and empathy that helped them when they encountered challenges. Several participants commented on their changing relationships with other professionals during and after they completed the degree which had an impact on their work-identity. I wanted to explore the significance of these relationships and the role they played in fostering transformative learning.

While not all relate to an online educational context, several authors have identified significant relational qualities which have the potential to foster transformations and these were reflected in the data as participants explored the significance of developing virtual connections. Cranton (2006a:113) identifies the key elements of an authentic relationship: 'helping students to learn, caring for students, engaging in dialogue and being aware of exercising of power'. In the online context, Baran *et al* (2013) refer to educators as the 'guide on the side' which encourages the development of a relationship based on a distributed level of power and control. Smith (2004) notes the importance of building rapport and developing relationships which are warm and supportive. Although these perspectives offer valuable additions to the discourse on relational qualities, I wanted to capture a more theoretical perspective in an attempt to expand the theoretical lens. By way of setting the scene I initially reflect on the relevance of Bourdieu's work, in particular his concept of habitus.

Transformations and the concept of habitus

As noted in the previous section, participants had concerns regarding their ability to undertake degree level study and these concerns often stemmed from negative experiences at school or cultural expectations:

People from my generation and background saw degrees as something special and for the minority, for an elitist group of intelligent people (Marea, Fourth contact).

It was participants' biographies, previous life experiences and cultural baggage which led them to question their academic ability and had the potential to prevent transformative learning. Weatherly (2007) suggests that the biggest obstacle adult learners face is within themselves. However, the work of Bourdieu (1990) and his

concepts of habitus, disposition and capital, while complex, offers a more satisfying explanation. One's habitus is made up of 'individual dispositions, cultural inclinations and patterns of behaviour' which are neither essential nor natural but rather socially conditioned (Illeris 2014a:61). It is therefore a 'mediated form of arbitrary social structure' (Maton 2012:57) which can ultimately predetermine one's life path. In broad terms, the habitus of participants did not match that of the institution (the field) in which they undertook their degree (Maton 2012). This led to participants experiencing feelings of uncertainty, unease and fear:

There is no doubt that the thought of undertaking a degree is daunting. I classed it as an academic qualification.....there was a fear of not having the necessary skills to complete it and the fear of failure even before I started (Lorna, First contact follow up).

Jo shared Lorna's fears noting that at the beginning of her studies she was overwhelmed with self-doubt. It could be assumed that participants did not have the required social, educational or cultural capital necessary to enter the world of academia. This led them to question both their entitlement and ability to successfully achieve a degree. In essence they were 'fish out of water'. As non-traditional learners, participants may have felt they needed to return to a more familiar habitus which could have impeded potential transformations or lead them to withdraw from the degree. As my research only included successful graduates I had no data to support this outcome and therefore I was more concerned with what led participants to complete the degree and, in the process, experience a transformation. In other words how did they become 'fish in water'?

Thomas (2002:431) suggests that the institutional habitus can act to perpetuate the values of dominant culture and therefore institutional pedagogy 'is not an instrument of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status'. As a result

participants may have found themselves at a disadvantage even before they commenced their studies. Janet reflected on the challenges she faced coming from what she defined as a 'non-academic' background:

[Suddenly I was] expected to be au fait with 'degree speak', it was a challenge to learn this as well as the content of the course (Fifth contact).

Perhaps the online context created a level playing field which acted to diminish the significance of the mismatch between participants' habitus and institutional habitus therefore creating conditions more conducive to fostering a transformation. Participants described the benefits of being invisible online which enabled them to avoid peer humiliation and, as a result, encouraged them to more openly express their views and engage in dialogue:

I felt it was easier to express my viewpoints via online discussions...I can reflect on what I have said before it gets posted and make sure it makes sense to myself and hopefully others (Jo, Third contact follow up).

West *et al* (2013) note that Bourdieu's work does not sufficiently explain how learners become 'fish in water' when their habitus does not match that of the institute (field). There is the suggestion that Bourdieu's focus is 'overly sociological' and that what is needed is a more 'fine-grained, psychosocial analysis' of how the inner world of learners shapes their outer world (West *et al* 2013:123). This led me to explore Honneth's theory of social recognition and Winnicott's concept of transitional space as alternative perspectives that would shed light on the relational nature of transformative learning experienced.

The relational nature of transformative learning

As I explored the relational nature of transformative learning I found myself returning to the data, in particular data related to incomplete transformations and participants' transformed self-identity. West (2014b:51) suggests that any example of transformative learning 'is a process at once relational, intersubjective, intimate as well as social in nature'. By emphasising the intersubjective nature of transformative learning issues related to trust, recognition and respect are core to the educator-learner relationship, as well as creating space for doubt, confusion and relational anxiety (Murphy and Brown 2012). Participants frequently commented on the relationships they developed with tutors outlining the relational qualities that kept them going:

During the [Degree] there was one person that motivated me....I know if she hadn't been there when times got really stressful (and these times were quite frequent) I would have given up very easily. It was her faith in me that kept me going (Shona, Second contact).

Honneth's theory of critical social recognition outlines the significance of 'social relationships to the development and maintenance of a person's identity' (Anderson 1995:x). Unlike Mezirow, Honneth distances himself from cognitive rationalism focusing more on the significance of intersubjectivity and the key role of recognition and mutuality. According to Honneth (1995) a person's identity is shaped through the establishment of relations of mutual recognition. Therefore, in order to develop a relationship with ourselves, that is, our self-identity, we require an intersubjective recognition of our abilities and achievements (Fleming 2011). Of interest to this research project was the establishment of these reciprocal relations of recognition and their potential to create conditions capable of fostering transformative learning online.

Participants valued the relationships they encountered during their studies and made good use of the online tools to develop support networks with fellow students. Lorna described how she built up her own circle of friends making good use of the discussion boards to nurture these relationships. She stated that these relationships impacted on her studies and helped to clarify her thinking. Rena used the phrase 'mentoring style' to describe the reciprocal relationships she developed with tutors:

[These relationships] were empowering....I responded to them in a more positive proactive way because they had the people skills....these skills were transferred and had a positive impact on me, my development and outcomes...they gave me a journey with purpose, helped me grow with the experience and gave me a really good learning memory (Second contact and follow up).

The concept of recognition is also apparent in Winnicott's (1971) work. It is suggested that early experiences of recognition lay the solid foundation for later life. Positive early relationships in which the child feels loved and secure have the potential to create a safe transitional space in which the child can play and engage in creativity (West *et al* 2013 and West 2014a/b). Play therefore offers 'a transitional space in which fundamental negotiations around self, in relation, take place' (West 2011:368). These ideas can be applied to the experiences of the participants where their studies became a transitional place in which they struggled to 'play' with new ideas and changing identities. The establishment of relations of mutual recognition created a safe space in which they were able to 'play' and work through their changing relationships with self and therefore opened a window for potential transformations. This was particularly evident in Charlotte's story. The reciprocal relationship she developed with the course leader in conjunction with the relative anonymity the online context offered, created a transitional space in which she felt

safe to experiment with her identity and in doing so, was able to construct a transformed self-view. It was interesting to note the value that Charlotte placed on the views of others which connects with Honneth's concept of mutual recognition: 'I could no longer see myself as a waste of space as I have achieved something that others see as important' (Fourth contact).

Honneth (1995) refers to three forms of self-awareness which are established through relations of mutual recognition: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. It is suggested that self-confidence is learned in the family, self-respect is a product of schooling and self-esteem is 'achieved as part of the normal interaction between adults in a functioning society' (Fleming and Finnegan 2010:9). In my view we need to examine the role adult education plays in the development of all three forms of self-awareness. Based on participants' experiences of incomplete transformations, in particular those I have defined as attitudinal changes, there is evidence that undertaking a degree can create conditions capable of promoting all three forms of self-awareness. The creation of an online learning community in which participants interacted, felt a sense of belonging, were supported and cared for, offered a transitional space in which participants' experienced mutual recognition. This resulted in participants developing confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. As participants experienced all three forms of self-awareness this evoked internal changes which enabled them to realise their potential as a group of professionals thereby transforming their work-role identity. These internal changes coincided with participants experiencing mutual recognition from other professionals. It was therefore the experience of mutual recognition from their fellow students, course tutors and other professionals that enabled the participants to not only develop the three forms of self-awareness but also transform their work-identity.

In situations where there is a 'denial of recognition', individuals will experience disrespect which has a negative impact on their self-identity (Honneth 1995:131). Honneth (1995) suggests that disrespect acts to harm individuals as it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired through the process of intersubjectivity. While participants' confidence, self-respect and self-esteem developed, there were still questions raised around how others would view a degree-led childhood practice profession:

Sadly the role of nursery practitioner does not seem to me to be given much recognition by other professionals. I do not know if the [Degree] changes this (Leslie, Third contact follow up).

Although Marea believed that the degree gave her more credibility, she felt that the profession would never be viewed with the same regard or status as teachers. Continued experiences of disrespect from wider society may act to dismantle participants' transformed work identity and their developed forms of self-awareness. In order to address these experiences of disrespect Flora reflected on the degree giving her power both as an individual and a professional and that this power had the potential to affect a change:

I recognise the power that I have as an individual professional....and the power that the sector could potentially have as an influential movement or think tank (Fourth contact follow up)

While the potential to affect change may have been possible without completing a degree, without the degree 'the power and professionalism would not have been recognised by other professionals' (Flora, Fourth contact follow up). If the childhood practice sector is able to harness the power Flora refers to as a degree-led

profession this will hopefully act to diminish experiences of disrespect perpetuated within the wider society which acts to under-value the sector.

Field of connectivity

As a concept, field of connectivity focuses on the significance of feeling connected and ways in which this feeling arises through the development of relationships and, more importantly, through interactivity. It was through participants' interactions with each other, with their tutors, with the course content and with the technology that created an online field of connectivity which had the potential to foster transformative learning as outlined in Figure 2.3 page 41. McGuire (2009) suggests that the creation of an online field of connectivity acts to humanise the machine. The aim of this section is two-fold. Firstly, based on participants' experiences I explore ways in which an online field of connectivity was established and how this had the potential to create the conditions for fostering transformative learning. Secondly, I outline ways in which a VLE may better suit the needs of non-traditional learners.

Acknowledging the intersubjective nature of transformative learning recognises the significance of trust, recognition, respect, support and empathy as core qualities of the interactions between learner-learner and learner-educator. Of interest to this research were the ways in which these core qualities could be developed within a VLE where interactions do not rely on sensory or expressive skills to establish and maintain relationships (Major 2010). Reflecting on the data presented in Chapter Five, in particular data related to the theme of virtual connectedness, I believe that it was possible to establish these core qualities within a VLE which then enabled the establishment of the essential elements of a virtual learning community. Participants described being supported by their fellow students and tutors, they felt part of a group, they were viewed as individuals, they felt understood and they encountered thoughtful tutors who cared for them. Their viewpoints and online

contributions were also valued. This enabled participants to consider alternative perspectives, therefore encouraging them to become more open-minded, reflective and accepting. In defining what was meant by a 'personal touch', Marea noted a number of ways in which tutors connected with her in the VLE: regular tutor postings, video clips, online tutorials, tutor replies were prompt, supportive and encouraging. She believed that the regular postings kept all students up to date and encouraged engagement. The video clips presented information in a visual and an audible format which she felt made the information seem more personal.

Online educators can make good use of the technology to engage and connect with their learners. Catriona referred to a fun element when communicating with others in the VLE which encouraged her to see the benefits of interacting online in a more personal way. When asked to clarify what she meant by fun, Catriona noted:

....banter really - light hearted humour....some were so funny made us laugh.

Gave a balance, things did not feel so daunting or impossible in the huge task ahead (Second contact follow up).

Online learning resources within the Childhood Practice Degree are interactive which encourages learners to undertake individual activities as well as collaborative work. Good use is made of the online discussion board which allows learners and tutors to engage in asynchronous discussion and synchronous discussions take place within online chat rooms. This is all facilitated within BB which is the VLE used by UHI. One of the main forms of online communication utilised is email. It is interesting to note that a number of participants did feel isolated and missed the immediacy of interacting face-to-face with fellow students and tutors. For some participants, feeling isolated was self-induced. Marea reflected on how she isolated herself and Kathleen preferred not to be distracted by what she referred to as the social side. The VLE and email communication offered opportunities for daily

interactivity which would be impossible to replicate in a face-to-face class that meets once a week. Ronnie referred to herself as a person who likes to discuss and explore issues and noted that she found the online environment enabled her to communicate on a regular basis with her fellow students and tutors. Lorna found the flexibility of learning online addictive, noting that she logged on and contributed on a daily basis. Rena mentioned that she logged on every night before she went to bed checking for new postings or emails.

Some participants found interacting in an online synchronous chat room challenging and while they read the recorded transcripts they struggled to contribute to live discussions. Louise described feeling slightly disconnected in the chat rooms noting that her typing speed affected her ability to fully engage. In my view, participants' reluctance to engage with the synchronous chat was mainly a confidence issue related to internal worries as well as concerns about the technology. As Louise outlined it was her lack of confidence and self-doubt that contributed towards her feeling disconnected. Terry reflected on her lack of confidence with technology noting that the degree being online scared her. However, once Terry mastered the skill of communicating online she felt connected with her fellow students and recognised the benefits of engaging with them in the online community.

As a professional practitioner award, the content of the Childhood Practice Degree should connect with those undertaking the award as well as the *Standard for Childhood Practice* (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2007). This relates to the element 'relevance' which Palloff and Pratt (2007) note is essential in establishing an online learning community. Being able to relate to the course content established a natural connection between participants and also enabled them to more meaningfully interact with it. This promoted feelings of being an expert and empowered the participants, therefore encouraging them to be more active in the

online community. Susan described ways in which her studies linked with her professional practice which helped her to feel more engaged. Rena spoke positively about the opportunity to interact online with fellow students in similar workplace situations. As outlined in Chapter Two page 42, prior to joining the Childhood Practice Degree participants already shared common professional interests, knowledge and experiences, and therefore the development of an online community of practice was more easily established. Participants found themselves in a unique position in that as learners they were part of an online learning community and as professional practitioners they were also part of an online community of practice. This presented potential opportunities for fostering transformative learning. Reflecting on the data, I suggest the element of relevance created conditions for promoting what I have referred to as examples of incomplete transformations: encouraged participants to adopt a more reflective approach to their practice, become more open minded and willing to accept alternative viewpoints. I also believe that the element of relevance in conjunction with the development of other essential elements of an online learning community contributed towards creating the conditions that enabled participants to transform their work-role identity.

I have previously noted that the VLE met the needs of participants better as non-traditional learners and in doing so opened windows of opportunities to foster transformative learning. The relative anonymity of the VLE had the potential to create a level playing field and as a result establish a safe space in which participants were more willing and able to interact with others, the course content and the technology. This encouraged participants to engage in a level of dialogue they might not have encountered in a face-to-face classroom. The gift of time and space afforded by the VLE allowed participants to fit their studies around their busy working and life schedule. This aspect also offered participants space to reflect and time to respond which encouraged a deeper level of dialogue. However, while the

creation of a field of connectivity has the potential to foster a transformation the decision to engage with the process is dependent on the readiness and willingness of the learners (Cranton and Taylor 2012)

Conclusion

In this chapter I reflected on the limits of transformation discussing the challenges I faced in constructing participants' transformations as well as noting the occurrence of incidental transformations. As I explored ways in which I constructed participants' transformations I found myself revisiting my theoretical lens and making links with a more unified perspective of transformative learning. In particular, Dirkx's concept of nurturing a learner's soul and Illeris' recent proposal that transformative learning is all learning that signifies a change in the identity of the learner. Recognising the relational and intersubjective nature of transformative learning I was able to draw on Honneth's theory of social recognition and Winnicott's concept of transitional space to show ways in which the process of transformative learning can be fostered through the establishment of relationships based on mutual recognition. The development of these relationships in a VLE lay the foundation for the creation of a learning community and it is this that promotes a field of connectivity which, in turn, promotes transformative learning. While it is human interactivity that has the potential to foster a transformation, the technology is a significant enabler. Without the technology the interactivity would not be possible but the human remains in control. Indeed the online technology may provide a level playing field which better suits the needs of non-traditional learners. In the next chapter I draw together the main threads of the thesis. In presenting a summary I revisit the research questions, outline ways in which my research has contributed to knowledge and theory, discuss the limits of my research project and conclude noting my personal reflections.

Chapter Seven Conclusions

Transformative learning is first and foremost about educating from a particular worldview, a particular educational philosophy....without developing a deeper awareness of our own frames of reference and how they shape practice, there is little likelihood that we can foster change in others (Taylor 2008:13).

Introduction

The overarching aim of this research project was to explore the nature of transformative learning in an online educational context. As part of this exploration the potential of the online context as a space capable of fostering transformative learning was also investigated. This final chapter offers an opportunity to draw my thesis together and present a summary of what I have achieved with regard to the above noted overarching aim. The following sections provide a structure for this final chapter: Revisiting the research questions, Contribution to knowledge, Relevance to practice, Limits of research, Further research and Personal reflections.

Revisiting the research questions

This research offered an opportunity to explore three areas of interest: theory and educational practice with regard to transformative learning, the experiences of non-traditional learners who completed a Childhood Practice Degree at UHI and the online educational context. These areas informed the research questions which guided and structured this research project. While remaining cautious to avoid repetition, revisiting the research questions presents an opening to summarise ways in which the questions were addressed.

Key question: What is the nature of transformative learning in an online educational context?

As revealed by the data the nature of transformative learning online related more to the affective and social dimensions and therefore reflected what has been referred to as the broader landscape of transformative learning. Participants' transformations involved their emotions, memory and social interactions. Their transformations were embodied experiences which demonstrated multiple ways of knowing, therefore the concept, habits of being, was relevant. Participants' experiences of incidental transformations indicated ways in which studying online connected with their inner worlds. The significance of others highlighted the relational and intersubjective nature of participants' transformations. The potential to raise the professional status of the childhood practice sector was demonstrated but continued experiences of disrespect may act to diminish this. The nature of participants' transformations also related to changes in their identity, in particular self, learner and work identities and potential connections between these.

Sub-question: How is transformative learning constructed by learners one year after the completion of their online studies?

Drawing on factors outlined in Chapter Four pages 78 and 79, I constructed participants' transformations based on my interpretations rather than theirs. At no point was there an attempt to quantify participants' transformation. If I was unable to construct the transformative process participants' transformations were defined as incomplete. However, when there was an interplay between participants' incomplete transformations this had the potential to foster a complete transformation. Participants' transformations appeared more fluid than linear in form. There was a sense of an unfolding experience, a gradual realisation which involved movement as participants underwent a transformation. The experience of

a transformation often reflected participants' biographies, their history or culture. As participants entered the world of academia, they encountered a space in which it was possible to construct an alternative identity and in doing so experience a transformation. Similar to participants' incomplete transformations, the data revealed that when there was an interplay between participants' self, learner and work identities, there was the potential to experience a transformation.

Sub-question: What qualities of an online relationship are significant in creating the conditions for fostering transformative learning?

The core qualities of an online relationship identified in this research which had the potential to create the conditions to foster transformative learning were trust, recognition, respect, support, empathy and social presence. The establishment of these core qualities promoted the development of relationships based on mutual recognition and recognised the relational and intersubjective nature of transformative learning. Relationships based on these core qualities enabled and encouraged the exchange of rich dialogue amongst the participants and between the participants and the educator. What Belenky *et al* (1996:146) refer to as 'real talk'. As a result participants were more able to embrace edge emotions when faced with alternative perspectives or viewpoints. Relationships based on mutual recognition also created a safe space in which participants could consider an alternative identity. While the establishment of core relational qualities have the potential to foster transformative learning it should not be assumed that these alone are sufficient to foster a transformation.

Sub-question: In what ways can an online learning community be established which has the potential to foster transformative learning?

The establishment of the core qualities of an online relationship noted above laid the foundation for the development of an online learning community. Without these core qualities it would have become more challenging to establish the essential elements of an online learning community which could potentially have had an impact on creating conditions to foster a transformation. Palloff and Pratt (2007) identify five essential elements of an online learning community: honesty, responsiveness, respect, openness and empowerment. Despite the absence of visual cues, data collected as part of this research project indicated the presence of all five essential elements in the VLE at UHI.

Participants reflected on developing a sense of belonging and feeling connected to fellow learners, their tutors and the course content. Being separated by space and time offered the participants an opportunity to reflect and revisit online postings and learning resources which encouraged a deeper level of engagement. Participants commented positively on the presence of a 'personal touch', an 'element of fun' and regular postings/feedback from tutors online which further enhanced their feelings of connection. While the participants and the tutors were at the heart of the online collaboration and interaction, participants did identify a number of online tools that assisted them to feel more engaged and connected: asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous online chats, video clips and regular email correspondence. Although some participants were, at times, reluctant to engage with the technology, I suggest that this related more to a lack of confidence or personal choice rather than an unwillingness to become part of the online learning community. The relative ease with which the online learning community developed may have been due to participants also being part of an online community of practice. Again it is not

possible to assume that the establishment of these essential elements would foster a transformation but their presence does enhance the potential.

Contribution to knowledge

In this research project I used an online research method to gather qualitative data related to the transformative experiences of non-traditional learners who completed an online Childhood Practice Degree one year prior to taking part in this research. My research therefore contributes to furthering knowledge on the use of technology to gather qualitative data and the potential of the online context to foster transformative learning. The following areas outline ways I may have contributed to knowledge:

I. Interactivity: the role of people and technology

My research has demonstrated that transformative learning can be fostered in an online educational context in the same way that it is fostered in a face-to-face classroom. In line with Cranton (2010), the key factors responsible for fostering the process online are the development of mutual relationships and interactions among learners, and between learners and educators in which individuals feel safe and free to express their points of view and feel supported and challenged by their fellow learners and educators. Interactivity therefore lies at the heart of fostering transformative learning online; that is, interactions among learners, interactions between learners and their educators, interactions with the course content and interactions with the technology (see figure 2.3 page 41). My research has shown that it is learners and educators that create the conditions capable of fostering transformative learning online. However, the central role played by the technology should not be overlooked. The technology can be viewed as the vehicle which provides the platform in which the interactivity can take place. The technology is

therefore a significant enabler to creating conditions capable of promoting transformative learning.

II. Transformative learning online: the broader landscape

The empirical findings from my research have contributed to what Dirkx (2014) refers to as the broader landscape of transformative learning. They have shown the importance of the affective and social dimensions of transformative learning online and the potential for learners to experience incidental transformations during a course of online study in which transformative learning was not a curricular aim. I have described the experience as an unfolding process, a growing realisation of change. I therefore believe the experience of a transformation is unique to the individual or social group and as a result, trying to quantify or standardise the process is problematic. The focus should be on constructing the transformative process which establishes evidence to support the transformative outcome. However, this can still prove problematic as issues arise related to who is best placed to construct the process, are learners consciously aware of the process and are they able to articulate their experiences.

III. Transformative learning and identity

My data has revealed ways in which learning online can transform a learner's identity. This supports Illeris' (2014a/b) recent perspective that transformative learning is all learning that signifies a change in the identity of a learner. I have suggested that the experience of embarking on an online course of study creates a transitional space in which learners' can construct and reconstruct their identity and in doing so experience a transformation. The relative anonymity of online learning may act to nurture this process. The data also showed that when learners

experience an inter-play between their self, learner and work identities a transformation may take place.

IV. Transformative learning online: the non-traditional learner

The data collected suggests that the online context may act to level the playing field thereby enabling non-traditional learners to adjust more easily to the habitus of academia. This, in turn, has the potential to create conditions capable of fostering transformative learning. There is further evidence that the online context may suit the needs and fears of non-traditional learners better which again has the potential to foster transformative learning.

V. Transformative learning online: relational and intersubjective nature

The process of expanding my theoretical lens has contributed to developing an understanding of the relational, intersubjective nature of transformative learning online. Making links with Honneth's (1995) work I was able to show ways in which the process of transformative learning is related to learners establishing relationships based on mutual recognition. My research also demonstrates the potential role of adult education in the development of Honneth's three forms of self-awareness: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Reflecting on Winnicott's (1971) work my data shows the potential of the online context to create a transitional space in the establishments of relationships based on mutual recognition which in turn enables learners to feel safe to explore alternative identities and therefore has the potential to foster a transformation.

VI. The online context: a space for collecting qualitative data

My research contributed to current thinking and practice with regard to utilising the online context as a research setting, capable of eliciting qualitative data. The use

of asynchronous semi-structured email interviews offered participants space and time to be silent, to reflect and carefully consider their responses. Catriona described how she found the email interview more enabling than if it had been face-to-face. It allowed her to 'draft ideas, further reflect, and then expand on them after a day or two had passed' (Sixth contact). The outcome of this process increased reflexivity and allowed the participants to learn from the stories they shared. In part the success of using email interviews in this research project was due to the participants and researcher being seasoned online users, and also having prior knowledge of each other before the research commenced.

Relevance to educational practice

As I consider the relevance of my research to educational practice, two questions come to my mind. First, in what ways has my data informed my professional practice?; and second, what relevance does my data have for other online adult educators? As outlined in Chapter Six page 120, I have suggested that for learning to be meaningful it should involve learners reflecting on their life experiences during the sense making process. This approach recognises the significance of learners' biographies and the ways in which these offer rich territory for fostering transformations. Transformative learning therefore is not merely the process of meeting a course objective or achieving a certain grade and, as a result, it is necessary to consider ways in which the practice of fostering transformative learning informs the design of an online course and influences course learning objectives and curricular aims. However, this does present challenges when trying to assess whether a learner has been transformed which raises a number of issues. Is it necessary to assess transformative learning and if so how? Will all learners be expected to transform? How is transformative learning fostered online? What role does the online educator have in fostering the process?

With regard to the practice of fostering transformative learning online, my data raises a number of factors: the significance of interactivity and the use of technology to facilitate this, the relational nature of transformative learning and the interpersonal skills required to communicate online, an awareness of learners' life stories and the impact these have on potential transformations, and lastly a recognition that transformative learning can be an emotionally threatening experience. So what does this all mean to me and other online educators? In order to support the occurrence of transformative learning in an online educational context, my research indicates a need for educators to revisit the use of technology in order to better understand ways in which it can be utilised to support the development of meaningful relationships when learners and educators are separated by space and time. It could be viewed as ethically questionable to force learners to transform and issues around how to assess the occurrence of transformations remain unresolved. However, if the aim of adult education is to foster transformative learning, not only does this have implications relating to the course design but also influences the way in which online educators interact with their learners, the online course content, online technology and with themselves.

Transformative learning therefore becomes more than a theoretical perspective that can be applied in practice, it becomes as Taylor (2008) suggests, an educational philosophy which requires educators to develop an awareness of their own biographies and ways in which these shape their practice. This is supported by Shockley *et al* (2008:198) who note that educators may need to understand better 'their personal and hidden inner curricular' and in doing so acquire a deeper awareness of their internal drivers and beliefs of what it means to be an online educator. Brookfield (2009:131) makes reference to the importance of 'modeling' which implies that educators should not encourage their learners to engage in transformative learning if they are not open to potential transformations themselves.

I therefore propose that, conceptually, the heart of transformative learning theory is a way of being.

Limits of research

There are a number of factors which could be viewed as limiting my research project: the use of retrospective interviews, my role in the process of data analysis and the occurrence of incidental transformations. I explore these factors in the following points:

I. Use of retrospective interviews

Taylor (2007) refers to the over reliance on retrospective interviews which involves participants recalling from memory and articulating moments that were often experienced at a tacit level which was outside their conscious awareness. While acknowledging this challenge, and the potential impact on my research, I believe that the use of retrospective interviews enabled the participants to revisit their experiences and, in so doing, allowed them to become more consciously aware and gain deeper insight into their lives:

The interview questions....have helped me reflect on my time of study and discover new things about myself in the process....bring a better conclusion to the end of my studies....has rounded it off, a bit like a more in-depth personal evaluation if that makes sense (Marea, Sixth contact).

The email interview also offered the participants a safe space in which they were able to consider their experiences more openly. Janet noted that using emails avoided the embarrassment that may have been caused in a face-to-face interview. This allowed her to be more 'introspective and fully open up' (Sixth contact). I recognised the potential for bias and subjectivity and understood that the

retrospective stories the participants shared may not represent reality but this reflected my theoretical stance as outlined in Chapter Three: 'realities are not abstract objects but rather dependent on the intersubjectivity' between individuals (Burgess *et al* 2006:55).

II. Data analysis: my role

When I initially embarked on the process of data analysis I was committed to adopting an inductive thematic approach. There was a desire to ensure that the participants' voices led the process. However, it quickly became apparent that this was perhaps an idealised approach. I struggled to come to terms with what Chenail (2012:1) refers to as 'analytic tension'. While my realisation was slow in coming I began to understand the inherent interplay between the process of inductive and deductive analysis and the significant role I had as the researcher responsible for guiding the process. While this played heavily on my mind I recognised that, as well as having a duty of care to my research participants, as an academic researcher, I also had a responsibility to contribute to advancing scholarly discourse. To address this I adopted a hybrid thematic approach as outlined in Chapter Four page 74, I understood the impact my creativity and intellectual interests had and the need to, at all times, adopt a reflexive and transparent approach. Although I am not suggesting my creativity and intellectual interests limited the research project I do acknowledge that the process and outcome of analysing the data remains unique to me.

While acknowledging that I may have enacted what Featherstone and Kelly (2007:279) refer to as 'a hierarchical valuing', the process of constructing participants' transformations was co-owned by both participants and me as the researcher. The integrity of the participants' stories was maintained while I applied my constructs to interpret their transformations. I understood that my focus on

transformative learning meant other potential examples of learning were overlooked, but the limits of this research project were driven by my research interests and rational.

III. Incidental transformations

Although transformative learning does not form part of the Childhood Practice Degree's curricular aims I had not fully considered the significance of incidental transformations prior to undertaking my research. When transformative learning is not a primary aim of an educational programme it becomes more challenging to define the nature of a transformation. This therefore had an impact on my ability to identify factors that contributed to fostering the transformative process. Charlotte's transformation was viewed as an incidental transformation because it was possible, based on her interview responses, to construct the transformative process as well as identify the factors that contributed to fostering this process. Establishing this level of detail proved more illusive for other examples of participants' transformations and, as a result, were identified as incomplete transformations. Had I been able to ask more probing follow-up interview questions perhaps this would have uncovered more detail and perhaps more incidental transformations. It is my view that the experience of undertaking a course of study may itself create the conditions capable of fostering a transformation. While this does pose challenges in trying to clearly construct the process, I propose that adult educators should remain mindful of the potential for transformative learning as their learners embark on a course of study.

Further research

Based on my research project the following areas have been identified which I believe merit further research:

I. Relational nature of transformative learning online

The relational, intersubjective nature of transformative learning online requires further investigation, in particular with regards to the ways in which the subjective qualities of support, trust, friendship and intimacy can be developed in an online educational context. Transformative learning can be a troubling experience, therefore the presence of supportive, authentic and caring online educators offers reassurance and guidance as learners experience a transformation. My data also shows that these qualities encourage learners to remain committed and motivated to push through their anxieties and to continue their studies during difficult times which could ultimately lead to them encountering a transformation.

Mezirow (1991:223) only briefly discusses the relational nature of transformative learning noting that the educator can be viewed as a 'mentor trying to help a friend'. While the phrase 'friend' draws attention to the significance of subjective qualities Mezirow offers little further clarification. In an online context Baran *et al* (2013:4) refers to online educators as a 'guide on the side' which involves them designing and facilitating a learner-centred approach resulting in a more distributed level of control. This presents a more satisfying perspective but doesn't shed light on how the subjective qualities and interpersonal skills required to establish meaningful relationships online can be developed when educators can no longer rely on sensory and expressive skills. I am not proposing that online educators should take on a counselling role nor am I implying that all learners will experience a transformation, however if the educational aim is to create conditions capable of fostering a transformation, research into ways in which the subjective qualities can

be developed online and how the technology can facilitate these qualities is necessary.

II. The construction of transformative learning

In order to prevent transformative learning being banished from the field of adult education, clarification is required on how the process is constructed. Recently Taylor and Laros (2014:5) referred to the 'porous boundaries' used to define transformative learning which has resulted in the lack of a consistent operational definition. Stuckey *et al* (2013) propose the use of a quantitative survey believing that employing a method to measure transformative outcomes and processes would help the field to move forward. I have suggested that operationalising the transformative process fails to acknowledge the complexities and inherent challenges learners face as they encounter a transformation and also, in my view, doesn't recognise the unique nature of transformative learning whether viewed as an individual or social process.

The recent definitions proposed by Hoggan (2014) and Illeris (2014) informed how I constructed participants' transformations. While this added an element of objectivity and ensured transparency, in the end, I constructed the participants' transformations based on my interpretations. Having said that it was the participants' stories that guided the process. If, in an attempt to prevent transformative learning suffering from evacuation, we are driven to operationalise the process we may fall into the trap of measuring it in order to establish its nature. I therefore propose that further investigation is required into the development of a more flexible tool that enables both scholars and educators to define the transformative process without quantifying it. While this may prove challenging or perhaps even unattainable I believe it merits attention.

III. Transformative learning, agency and lifelong learning

In a world of continuous change, equipping learners to manage the challenges they may encounter after leaving their studies is high on the agenda in higher education institutes. Although the world of academia traditionally viewed their role as imparting knowledge and wisdom there is a growing awareness of the need to prepare learners with the generic skills to guide their own learning to better prepare them for the situations they may encounter throughout their lives (Kirby *et al* 2010). UHI refers to these skills as 'employability skills and attributes' and identifies a clear link with the slogan 'what employers want' (Alexander 2013). Within my role as Childhood Practice Leader I have also come across the phrase 'graduateness' being used to refer to the qualities UHI is aspiring to instil in learners. Rather than focusing on the development of employability skills, based on the data collected as part of this research project, I propose that the process and outcomes of transformative learning has the potential to foster agency and lifelong learning. In particular, the characteristics Bath and Smith (2009:175) identify as associated with lifelong learning: 'self-efficacy, open-ness to experience and change readiness'. I therefore recommend further investigation is required to identify potential connections between the experience of transformative learning, agency and lifelong learning.

IV. Online learning and non-traditional learners

My data revealed that the online educational context can act as an equalizer which has the potential to diminish the significance of the mismatch between non-traditional learners' habitus and institutional habitus therefore creating conditions more conducive to fostering a transformation. If, as Thomas (2002) suggests, the institutional habitus can act to perpetuate the values of dominant culture, further research on ways in which the online context can eradicate this is necessary. From a practical perspective the flexibility of learning online and the gift of space and time offered by this context meets the needs of non-traditional learners better.

Personal reflections

Thinking back to the start of my EdD journey I find myself reflecting on the distance I have travelled personally and professionally, and the extent my knowledge and understanding of the theory and educational practice of transformative learning has developed. When I initially discovered Mezirow's theory of transformative learning I struggled to find a critical stance. I found it challenging to trawl through the copious amounts of research and writing already published on transformative learning and in doing so establish my own perspective. In the beginning I tended to view Mezirow's work through 'rose tinted glasses' which limited my outlook. However, the process of going back to Mezirow's original research/writing, and focusing my reading on seminal sources related to the theory and practice of transformative learning, as well as the process of undertaking my own research, enabled me to uncover a more discerning and informed perspective.

As a theoretical concept, transformative learning offers adult educators the potential to change learners' lives, however the realisation of this opportunity is plagued with obstacles and uncertainties. While my research has contributed to knowledge and practice related to the process of transformative learning online, more research is required. In order to prevent transformative learning being banished to the realm of theory or, as Newman (2012:51) suggests, removed from the 'educational lexicon altogether' there is a pressing need to move beyond Mezirow's theory. In particular, there is a need to draw on current research and writing on transformative learning to develop a more unified theoretical perspective, one that makes clear links with the educational practice of fostering transformative learning. Illeris's (2014a/b) recent publications point to a way forward by claiming that transformative learning is all learning that signifies a change in the identity of the learner. While this offers a more satisfying theoretical perspective in that it acknowledges the cognitive,

emotional and social dimensions, and recognises the significance of the learners' biographies, culture and societal environment, more research is required on the educational practice of fostering transformative learning. There is also a need to understand the potential impact transformative learning could have on other individuals who play a significant role in the lives of the learners who have undergone a transformation.

As my EdD studies come to an end I am drawn to consider the nature of my own transformation and reflect on the changes I have encountered on my EdD journey. I use the metaphor journey to represent my learning process. It suggests a path travelled, places to visit and people to meet along the way. While it implies a destination I have yet to reach the end of my journey, and have discovered paths leading me off in different directions. I embarked on my journey filled with a mixture of emotions: excitement, hope, fear and the anticipation of what could be. As expressed by several participants in this research project, I was initially overwhelmed by feelings of self-doubt. Despite my familiarity with the world of academia I found myself immersed in what I felt was uncharted territory. This led me to question my entitlement and ability to successfully complete a doctorate.

There were several turning points along my journey, most notably were the experiences I encountered and the people I met during the EdD residentials and my attendance at the first international conference led by European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) on transformative learning, held in Athens. These turning points enabled me to assess the distance I had travelled and offered space in which I was able to consider my future paths, away from my everyday work and family commitments. They helped me to recognise my potential and erode my feelings of self-doubt. The nature of my transformation has been an embodied experience, one that consumed my mind, body and soul. The external

experiences I encountered along my journey affected me internally. I began to question who I was as a person and also how I conducted myself in my professional role. There was a growing sense of fluidity between my past, the present and the potential of who I could be in the future which threw me off balance (and continues to do so). In a similar way to the participants in this research project, I encountered an inter-play between my self, learner and work identities which fostered a change in me. Although I recognise that I have changed, I find myself experiencing what Malkki and Green (2014:15) refer to as 'ontological or existential shock'. I have yet to fully understand or articulate ways in which I have changed. While my EdD journey has been a troubling process it has also been an exciting and inspiring time. It has been a privilege to carry out a piece of research exploring the experiences of childhood practice graduates. I remain indebted to them and humbled by the stories they shared.

During my EdD journey I came to realise that the concept of transformative learning 'lived' within me as an adult educator long before I discovered Mezirow's work. Throughout my professional career I have strived to become what Cranton (2001 and 2006b) refers to as an authentic educator. In doing so I have come to understand who I am as a human being, which has allowed me to relate to my learners as one person relating to another. I value the role I play as a member of a group of learners, while at the same time recognise my role as an educator within this group. All too often we can get caught up in theoretical perspectives which, while supporting and informing our practice as adult educators, do not define who we are as individuals. My research project has, in many ways, brought me back to the basics. A recognition that if my goal as an adult educator is to foster transformative learning, be that incomplete, complete or incidental, this should characterise my relationships with learners, the course content, the course context and with me. In a world of continuous change and fluidity, I believe that there is a

necessity to engage with the process of online education as an art, and in doing so recognise that human interactivity lies at the heart of this process, and it is this, as well as the enabling technology, that have the potential to foster transformative learning online.

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Appendix A: Research Projects – REC1 UHI Staff

All staff listed on the UHI Academic Register undertaking a research project must seek ethical approval via their **Senior Line Manager** prior to undertaking any form of fieldwork or data collection exercise.

Please read the **UHI Research Ethics Framework** before completing this form and submitting it to your Senior Line Manager for approval and signature. Please pay close attention to the guidance notes, as it may be necessary for you to complete another form as part of this exercise.

Further information on **UHI’s Research Ethics Policy** and the ethical approval process can be found at <http://www.uhi.ac.uk/home/research/research-ethics>

Name:	Alice Mongiello		
UHI Faculty:	Science, Health and Education		
Email:	alice.mongiello@inverness.uhi.ac.uk	Tel. No.:	01463 273351
Contact address:	Inverness College, Midmills Campus, Crown Ave IV2 3NG		
Project Title:	The Learning Journey. Exploring the transformational journeys for adult learners studying an online degree		
Outline Description:	Propose to explore the transformational journeys for students studying BA Childhood Practice as part of my EdD studies.		

Research Ethics Checklist

		Yes	No
1	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?		X

If the answer to the above question is “**Yes**”, compliance with NHS Guidelines will be required (see <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk>), and there is no need for you to answer the remaining questions. Please complete and sign the declaration at the end of this form and submit it to your Senior Line Manager.

If the answer is “**No**”, please continue to Question 2.

		Yes	No
2	Will the study involve human participants?	X	

If the answer to the above question is “**Yes**”, please answer the remaining questions.

If the answer is “**No**”, please complete and sign the declaration at the end of this form and submit it to your Senior Line Manager.

		Yes	No
3	Will the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable and may be unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 18, persons with disabilities, etc.)?		X
4	Will any of the interviews or questioning of participants be conducted in a language other than the respondents' first language?		X
5	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. school students, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home)		X
6	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)		X
7	Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (e.g. sexual activity, own drug use)?		X
8	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants?		X
9	Will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures?		X
10	Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants?		X
11	Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?		X
12	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks		X

	encountered in everyday life?		
13	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?		X
14	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X

If you have answered “No” in each case to **Questions 3-14**, please complete the Declaration and pass this form to your Senior Line Manager for approval.

If you have answered “Yes” to any of the questions, please complete **Form REC1-D Staff** and submit it to your Senior Line Manager along with this form.

DECLARATION

	Yes	N/A
I confirm that I have read the UHI Research Ethics Framework	X	
I confirm that NHS Ethics Approval is being/has been* sought and that the UHI Research Ethics Committee will be notified that such approval is in place		X

Signed: Alice Mongiello

Date: 21/01/2012

SENIOR LINE MANAGER AUTHORISATION

I confirm that:

The topic merits further research

The staff member has the skills to carry out the research

The information sheet or leaflet for research participants is appropriate

The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate

Yes	No
X	
X	
X	
X	

Comments - ‘Approved’ or ‘Not Approved’:

Approved

Heather Keyes

Date: 21/01/2012

Signed:

Thank You. Once authorised, please pass this form, along with Form REC1-D Staff if relevant, to the UHI Research Ethics Officer

Appendix B: UHI Ethics Approval

Karen Furness

Tue 07/02/2012 09:35

Dear Alice

Just to let you know that your application for ethical approval for "The Learning Journey" has been received and approval has been granted.

Best wishes

Karen

Karen Furness

Head of Grants and Contracts | Ceannard Thabhartasan agus Chunnraidhean

Research & Enterprise | Leasachadh agus Iomairt

University of the Highlands and Islands, Synergie Building, Fairways Business Park, Inverness, IV2 6AA

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean, Togalach Synergie, Pàirc Gnòthachais nan Glasach, Inbhir Nis, IV2 6AA

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Pròiseact crannchuir Coimisean nam Màile Bliadhna. Na companaidh earranta clàraichte ann an Alba, Àireamh 148203. Àireamh Carthannas Albannach Clàraichte SC022228. Oifis chlàraichte 12b Slighe Nis, Inbhir Nis, Alba, IV3 5SQ



Dear Graduate

I am a part-time doctorate student studying at the Open University. My Supervisors are Dr Paul Armstrong and Dr Lore Arthur. I am researching **transformative learning in an online context**.

You are invited to take part on my doctorate research. I am interested in exploring your experiences of studying the online childhood practice degree at UHI. If you are willing in taking part in my research, you will initially be invited to take part in an online email interview. Using e-mail, you will be sent a small set of questions. Based on your initial responses, you will be sent further questions which may ask you to clarify or add detail to your initial responses. It is hoped that the total number of email exchanges should not exceed 10 and the duration of the e-interview should not last longer than 4-6 weeks.

Following the e-interviews you will then be invited to take part in an online focus group during which you will be encouraged to explore the impact studying the childhood practice degree had/is having on your professional identity.

As noted on the attached consent form, all data collected will be used in an anonymous form.

I hope you are able to consider participating, as my research has been designed with the intention of providing a space for you to reflect on your experiences. Any questions and enquiries are welcome. Feel free to contact me for an informal chat at alice.mongiello@inverness.uhi.ac.uk or on 01463 273378 or 07411981216 to discuss any aspect of this research.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes

Alice Mongiello



Appendix D: Graduate informed consent form

Exploring transformative learning in an online context.

If you are willing to take part in this research project please tick the box and return the signed form (electronic signatures are accepted). At any time during the research you are free to withdraw and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from you, up to the point at which data are aggregated for analysis.

The results of any research project involving University of Highlands and Islands students constitute personal data under the Data Protection Act. They will be kept secure and not released to any third party. All data will be destroyed once the project is complete.

☐ I am willing to take part in this research, and I give my permission for the data collected to be used in an anonymous form in any written reports, presentations and published papers relating to this study. My written consent will be sought separately before any identifiable data are used in such dissemination.

Signing this form indicates that you understand the purpose of the research, as explained in the covering letter, and accept the conditions for handling the data you provide.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Please return completed form to:

alice.mongiello.ic@uhi.ac.uk

or post to:

Alice Mongiello

Inverness College UHI, Midmills Campus, Crown Ave, Inverness, IV2 3NG

For any enquiries please contact alice.mongiello.ic@uhi.ac.uk or 01463 273378

Appendix E: Guidance notes on conducting email interviews

A little while ago you agreed to take part in an email interview exploring your experiences of studying the online childhood practice degree at UHI as part of my doctorate research. Please read the following guidelines and if you are still happy to take part in the interview, please reply and I shall send you the first set of questions. Based on your initial responses, you will be sent further questions. It is hoped that the total number of email exchanges should not exceed five and the duration of the interview should not last longer than 4-6 weeks. The data gathered through the email interviews will provide a narrative of your account. These accounts will be used to inform my doctorate research. In undertaking the email interview please note the following guidelines:

1. The interviews will be conducted in the strictest confidence and your anonymity will be assured throughout my doctoral research.
2. You will be asked a number of questions which will be sent to you in small sets to enable you time to reflect and consider your responses. Supplementary questions may also be sent asking for further clarification.
3. It is anticipated that on-going dialogue will occur. In order to achieve this please ensure that you answer on the top of the message and question sent to you. Please do not answer at the bottom of it. This will ensure the sequence of questions and answers are not broken.
4. Please do not delete and part of the email dialogue. This will be our record of the conversation. Please do feel able to reflect on previous responses and add supplementary details where relevant.
5. Please try where possible to engage with the email interview as if you were having a face-to-face conversation with me. In doing so try not to become overtly anxious about spelling and grammar; what is important is the natural flow of your thoughts.
6. Where possible try to respond to email questions within three/five working days. I will also try to reply to your response within that timescale.
7. It is anticipated that the email dialogue will be completed by Easter.
8. Once the dialogue is complete you will be given an opportunity to take part in further email discussion.

Appendix F: Participants interviewed in this research project

Participant	Brief biography
Lorna	Age 47. Previous qualification SVQ 3 and PDA Early Years Care and Education. Married with two teenage children. Described herself as falling into the childhood practice profession. Employed full-time as manager in private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Chose UHI as was local university and online study offered flexible route.
Flora	Age 40. Previous qualification Nursery Nurse (SNNEB). Married with two teenage children. Entered the childhood practice profession as gave her 'an opportunity to do something'. It was viewed as an 'easy option'. Employed full-time as nursery nurse in local authority nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was because she didn't want to feel left behind with others more qualified than here. Chose UHI due to having previously studied there.
Catriona	Age 60. Previous qualification SVQ 3 Early Years Care and Education. Married with two children in their twenties. Describes her route in the childhood practice profession as 'unplanned'. Employed full-time as owner and manager of private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements also offered her an opportunity to 'make up for missed opportunities'. Chose UHI as online study would not radically affect her family and work commitments.
Charlotte	Age 37. Previous qualification HNC Childcare and Education and SVQ 4 Children's Care Learning and Development. Married with two

	<p>children in their late teens. Encouraged to enter the Childhood Practice Profession after having her own children. Employed full-time as nursery nurse in a private nursery. Manager persuaded her to undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree. She chose UHI due to the online mode of study which meant she wouldn't have to meet people face-to-face.</p>
Shona	<p>Age 56. Previous qualification Nursery Nurse (SNNEB). Married with three children two in their early twenties and one primary school age. She always 'wanted to work with children from a very early age'. Employed full-time as owner and manager of private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements and also being funded by local childcare partnership. Chose UHI as online study offered flexibility.</p>
Susan	<p>Age 57. Previous qualification HNC Early and Childcare. Married with two children in their twenties. Always had a genuine love of caring for young children. Employed part-time as a nursery nurse in a local authority nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was due to her personal commitment to lifelong learning. Chose UHI due to having positive experiences of previous study also online study offer her a flexible option that she could manage around her work commitments.</p>
Eilidh	<p>Age 28. Previous qualification HNC Early and Childcare. In long-term relationship no children. Encouraged to enter the childhood practice profession due to her experiences growing up of being surrounded by children as her mum was a child-minder. Employed full-time as nursery nurse in private nursery. Decision to undertake a</p>

	<p>Childhood Practice Degree was influenced by her decision not to pursue a career as a primary school teacher. Chose UHI due to having positive experiences of previous study there also online study meant she didn't have to move or travel.</p>
Janet	<p>Age 57. Previous qualifications HNC Childcare and Education and SVQ 4 Early Years Care and Education. Married with three children all in their late twenties. Encouraged to enter the Childhood Practice Profession after having her own children and experiences of caring for a younger sister. Employed full-time as owner and manager of private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Was recommended to study at UHI by local childcare partnership who were also funding her studies and also online study enabled her to work at her own pace and still work full-time.</p>
Kate	<p>Age 33. Previous qualification SVQ 4 Children's Care Learning and Development. Married no children. Entered the Childhood Practice profession as always something she wanted to do. Employed full-time as manager of private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Chose UHI due to having positive experiences of previous study there also online study offered her 'an added bonus. She could work full-time and study at the same time.</p>
Louise	<p>Age 35. Previous qualifications HNC and PDA Early Education and Childcare. Married with two children one preschool age and one primary school age. Was drawn to the childhood practice profession due what she describes as a '<i>caring personality</i>' and a desire to work</p>

	with children. Employed full-time as nursery nurse in local authority nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was due to viewing this as the way forward for her career prospects in line with SSSC requirements. Chose UHI as offered her a flexible method that she could fit around other commitments.
Linda	Age 48. Previous qualification SVQ 4 Children's Care Learning and Development. Married with four teenage children. Encouraged to enter the childhood practice profession after having her own children. Employed full-time as manager in local authority nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements and also being funded by local childcare partnership. Chose UHI as online study offered flexibility.
Kathleen	Age 43. Previous qualifications HNC Social Care. Divorced with two teenagers. Found herself naturally drawn to the childhood practice profession. Had an interest in working with primary school children. Employed full-time as play co-ordinator in local authority. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was fuelled by what she notes as 'well, if they're doing it, I want to do it'. She didn't want to see something go past her and also hoped it would help for future career progression. Chose UHI as online study offered flexibility and also employer offered to fund her studies.
Leslie	Age 56. Previous qualifications SVQ 3 and PDA Early Years Care and Education. Married with two child in their late teens. Encouraged to enter the childhood practice profession after having her own children. Employed full-time as owner and manager of private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was

	based on it being relevant to her employment, SSSC requirements and also she had a personal desire to undertake degree level study. Chose UHI as was her local university.
Terry	Age 51. Previous qualification SVQ 3 Early Education and Childcare. Married with one teenage child. Describes herself as 'falling' into the childhood practice profession. Employed full-time as manager in private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Was recommended to study at UHI by local childcare partnership who were also funding her studies.
Fiona	Age 52. Previous qualifications HNC Childcare and Education. Married with one child in his twenties. Had always wanted to work with young children. Employed full-time as manager in private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements and also employer offered to fund. Chose UHI as online study offered flexibility to continue working full-time.
Ronnie	Age 39. Previous qualification Nursery Nurse (SNNEB). Married no children. Noted that she entered the childhood practice profession by 'chance' but looking back has no regrets. Employed full time as a manager in a private nursery. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Chose UHI as online study offered flexibility, she could continue to work and study in the evenings.
Jo	Age 38. Previous qualifications HNC Childcare and Education and PDA Early Education and Childcare. Married no children. Entered the childhood practice profession 'to help support children through

	<p>their life'. Employed part-time as nursery nurse in a local authority nursery. She notes that her decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree was because she had 'got the learning bug'. Chose UHI due to having positive experiences of previous study there and also online study offered her the flexibility 'to carry on working to pay the bills'.</p>
Marea	<p>Age 53. Previous qualifications SVQ 3 and PDA Early Education and Childcare. Divorced with two children in their twenties. Being the eldest of four children looking after children was something that came naturally to Mare she became interested in entering the childhood practice profession having become involved in the playgroup movement with her own children. Employed full time as manager in voluntary sector. Decision to undertake a Childhood Practice Degree due to changing SSSC requirements. Chose UHI as online study 'suited my work life and fitted around my commitments'.</p>
Michelle	<p>Age 46. Previous qualification HNC Early Education and Childcare. Married with two teenage children. Due to her natural affinity with children she was encouraged to enter the childhood practice profession by her school teachers. Employed full-time as a learning support assistant in a local authority primary school. Due to changing personal circumstances Marea found herself in a position where she needed to enhance her employment status, undertaking a Childhood Practice Degree offered her this opportunity. Chose UHI as 'perfect for continuing with my career whilst looking after my family'.</p>

Appendix G: Email interviews timeline

IC = Informed Consent emailed CC = Consent confirmed		ICG = Informed consent given PA = Participant agreed		xQ = set of questions emailed xQ = Response to set of questions		xFUQ = Set follow up questions emailed xFUQ = Response to set of follow up questions													
				Where x = 1 – 6															
Stage	Lorna	Flora	Catrina	Charlotte	Shona	Susan	Ellidh	Janet	Kate	Louise	Linda	Kathleen	Leslie	Terry	Fiona	Ronnie	Jo	Marea	Michelle
IC	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13	4/2/13
ICG	12/2/13	18/2/13	11/2/13	26/2/13	11/2/13	4/2/13	7/2/13	12/2/13	6/2/13	14/2/13	7/2/13	5/2/13	6/2/13	5/2/13	5/2/13	6/2/13	8/2/13	7/2/13	17/2/13
CC	1/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13
PA	1/3/13	20/3/13	19/3/13	17/4/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	21/3/13	19/3/13	21/3/13	17/4/13	20/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13
1Q	3/3/13	20/3/13	19/3/13	17/4/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	20/3/13	21/3/13	19/3/13	21/3/13	17/4/13	20/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13	19/3/13
R1Q	3/3/13	25/3/13	22/3/13	20/4/13	24/3/13	24/3/13	24/3/13	20/3/13	27/3/13	20/3/13	21/3/13	21/4/13	29/3/13	22/3/13	20/3/13	21/3/13	20/3/13	22/3/13	19/3/13
IFUQ	6/3/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	30/4/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	16/4/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	30/4/13	16/4/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	21/3/13	21/3/13	21/3/13	19/3/13
R1FUQ	7/3/13	3/4/13	29/3/13	7/5/13	31/3/13	29/3/13	31/3/13	17/4/13	1/5/13	17/4/13	29/3/13	1/5/13	23/4/13	27/3/13	30/4/13	22/3/13	22/3/13	22/3/13	19/3/13
2Q	8/3/13	16/4/13	16/4/13	7/5/13	16/4/13	16/4/13	16/4/13	30/4/13	7/5/13	30/4/13	16/4/13	7/5/13	30/4/13	28/3/13	7/5/13	24/3/13	21/3/13	23/3/13	19/3/13
R2Q	19/3/13	22/4/13	25/4/13	13/5/13	25/4/13	29/4/13	22/4/13	11/5/13	14/5/13	12/5/13	17/4/13	19/5/13	7/5/13	28/3/13	28/5/13	29/3/13	22/3/13	26/3/13	29/3/13
2FUQ	26/3/13	29/4/13	30/4/13	13/5/13	30/4/13	29/3/13	30/4/13	11/5/13	14/5/13	14/5/13	30/4/13	22/5/13	14/5/13	16/4/13	16/4/13	16/4/13	25/3/13	25/3/13	29/3/13
R2FUQ	16/4/13	30/4/13	7/5/13	14/5/13	7/5/13	29/3/13	14/5/13	13/5/13	21/5/13	20/5/13	30/4/13	22/5/13	15/5/13	24/4/13	24/4/13	19/4/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	19/3/13
3Q	7/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	14/5/13	14/5/13	29/4/13	30/4/13	13/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	7/5/13	24/5/13	14/4/13	30/4/13	3/6/13	16/4/13	22/3/13	16/4/13	16/4/13
R3Q	7/5/13	7/5/13	12/5/13	20/5/13	22/5/13	1/5/13	5/5/13	22/5/13	31/5/13	21/5/13	10/5/13	26/5/13	20/5/13	30/4/13	10/6/13	18/4/13	23/3/13	22/4/13	16/4/13
3FUQ	7/5/13	14/5/13	14/5/13	21/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	14/5/13	14/5/13	22/5/13	22/5/13	19/4/13	19/4/13	19/4/13	25/3/13	25/3/13	16/4/13
R3FUQ	17/5/13	17/5/13	17/5/13	27/5/13	8/5/13	8/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	7/5/13	14/5/13	14/5/13	22/5/13	4/6/13	19/4/13	19/4/13	19/4/13	26/3/13	26/3/13	16/4/13
4Q	14/5/13	13/5/13	22/5/13	21/5/13	24/5/13	13/5/13	13/5/13	24/5/13	3/6/13	24/5/13	22/5/13	28/5/13	22/5/13	7/5/13	10/6/13	21/4/13	16/4/13	22/4/13	17/4/13
R4Q	14/5/13	14/5/13	28/5/13	27/5/13	28/5/13	17/5/13	21/5/13	29/5/13	7/6/13	5/6/13	22/5/13	2/6/13	4/6/13	9/5/13	11/6/13	28/4/13	19/4/13	24/4/13	18/4/13
4FUQ	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	6/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13	25/6/13
R4FUQ	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13	23/5/13
5Q	22/5/13	21/5/13	28/5/13	28/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	21/5/13	3/6/13	7/6/13	6/6/13	24/5/13	3/6/13	4/6/13	14/5/13	21/6/13	2/5/13	22/4/13	25/4/13	18/4/13
R5Q	3/6/13	23/5/13	30/5/13	7/6/13	9/6/13	24/5/13	23/5/13	5/8/13	21/6/13	25/6/13	27/5/13	3/6/13	12/6/13	15/5/13	22/6/13	8/5/13	26/4/13	29/4/13	19/4/13
5FUQ	3/6/13	23/5/13	30/5/13	7/6/13	9/6/13	24/5/13	23/5/13	5/8/13	21/6/13	25/6/13	27/5/13	3/6/13	12/6/13	15/5/13	22/6/13	8/5/13	26/4/13	29/4/13	19/4/13
R5FUQ	3/6/13	23/5/13	30/5/13	7/6/13	9/6/13	24/5/13	23/5/13	5/8/13	21/6/13	25/6/13	27/5/13	3/6/13	12/6/13	15/5/13	22/6/13	8/5/13	26/4/13	29/4/13	19/4/13
6Q	4/6/13	24/5/13	3/6/13	7/6/13	10/6/13	28/5/13	24/5/13	6/6/13	26/6/13	25/8/13	28/5/13	4/6/13	27/6/13	22/5/13	23/8/13	9/5/13	26/4/13	30/4/13	19/4/13
R6Q	27/7/13	27/5/13	6/6/13	8/6/13	10/6/13	29/5/13	30/5/13	23/6/13	8/9/13	5/9/13	28/5/13	12/6/13	28/6/13	22/5/13	5/9/13	15/5/13	26/4/13	1/5/13	20/4/13
6FUQ	27/7/13	27/5/13	6/6/13	8/6/13	10/6/13	29/5/13	30/5/13	23/6/13	8/9/13	5/9/13	28/5/13	12/6/13	28/6/13	22/5/13	5/9/13	15/5/13	26/4/13	1/5/13	20/4/13
R6FUQ	27/7/13	27/5/13	6/6/13	8/6/13	10/6/13	29/5/13	30/5/13	23/6/13	8/9/13	5/9/13	28/5/13	12/6/13	28/6/13	22/5/13	5/9/13	15/5/13	26/4/13	1/5/13	20/4/13

Stage 1: Data extracted

Stage 2: Data Analysis – common threads identified, noted in **bold**.

Questions and Responses	Threads	Notes
<p>First contact</p> <p>Date sent 19/3/2013</p> <p>Date responded 20/3/2013</p>		
<p>What originally led you to pursue a career working with young children? Explore your thoughts for me.</p> <p>I have thought about this long and hard and not sure if I have a definitive answer. I lost my father to a sudden heart attack at the age of 12 and I remember this having quite a knock on effect on my teenage years and I felt that I wasn't offered any support to help with this. My school did not support my loss at all. As I went through my school years I remember thinking that I would like to work in a role offering support to others. This led me on to doing a Youth Training Scheme at the age of 16 (I left school as soon as I could) in caring for others. Within this I undertook placements with elderly, children/adults with additional needs and nursery age children. I enjoyed all placements but preferred working with the younger age group. On completion of my course I got a job working as a Nanny for a five year old boy. This was an eye opener as the child had behavioural problems and his parents were hoteliers who were partial to a drink. After two years I thought that maybe childcare wasn't for me and went into hospitality working in various hotels doing bar and reception work.</p> <p>After 3 years of hotel work I felt that I wasn't being challenged enough so decided to go back to college to gain a qualification in childcare with an aim to help support children through their life. I enjoyed the course and I do enjoy my job but I still feel there is something lacking in my career, as I always say I am unsure what I want to be when I grow up!! I do not feel that I am fulfilling my original passion for helping others through challenging times in their lives and offer support where needed.</p>	<p>Looking for a Change</p>	<p>A desire to help others, fuelled by personal experience</p> <p>Wanted more, not being challenged</p>

<p>Why did you decide to undertake an online Childhood Practice Degree at UHI?</p> <p>After completion of my HNC in 2000 I got the learning bug. I went on to study various qualifications which allowed me to look at being able to achieve the BA. If someone had asked me 15 years ago if I would be doing a BA I would have said no way, but it is so accessible. Having the degree online allowed me to carry on working to pay the bills etc but had the flexibility to do study in the spare time I had. If the degree was only offered as a face to face full time course I would not even have considered it. I have had positive experiences with UHI throughout previous studies, so when a course of interest is offered they would be my first option. What I liked was that my previous qualifications allowed for me to access the course at a higher level.</p>	<p>Adult learner</p> <p>Online context: Learning environment</p>	<p>Online context offered flexibility to meet need as adult learner</p> <p>Recognition of previous vocational qualifications</p>
<p>First contact follow up</p> <p>Date sent 21/3/2013</p> <p>Date responded 22/3/2013</p>		
<p>Can you share with me what your initial thoughts of the childcare profession were at the time you entered working with children as a career.</p> <p>My initial thoughts were that I was completely unprepared for a career in childcare. Throughout my training I was shown how to work with 4&5 year olds and school age children and then I was employed to work with 2 year olds. I did have personal experience of younger children but not in a professional manner. To be honest my HNC training had not prepared me for employment in childcare at all.</p> <p>I was very lucky that I started within a new nursery so practice was up to date and was always kept current. I received a lot of on the job training to keep me up to date with best practice. I think going into the private sector made me aware of a much wider area of childcare out with the 'school' nursery setting and taught me a lot which I still refer to now 13 years later.</p>		<p>Practitioner qualification did not prepare for professional role</p> <p>New setting, good initial experience</p>
<p>Second contact</p>		

<p>Date sent 21/3/2013</p> <p>Date responded 22/3/2013</p>		
<p>Explore what made you feel most engaged/connected as you studied an online Childhood Practice Degree and tease out reasons why this was the case for you.</p> <p>I liked having the discussion boards and I felt having weekly tasks to complete kept you on task. I liked when there was links to legislations/websites etc. as when the reading or weekly work was getting quite overpowering you could take a break by looking and researching new materials. I LOVED the YouTube clips that really suited my learning style. I am not a visual learner so the high level of reading could become tiresome, so it was great to have a 'face to face' tutorial. I always made myself a cuppa and sat with my notebook whilst absorbing the info being given. Would be great to see this style of teaching across the board to meet all learning styles.</p> <p>Were there any significant challenges, incidents or individuals that impacted your experiences while studying the online Childhood Practice Degree? Explore these for me and outline reasons why they were significant for you.</p> <p>I wouldn't necessarily say that there were situations that had impact on my studies but I did feel very intimidated at the beginning of the course by what I felt was a much higher level of intellect than myself. I felt that I was out of my depth and that I would not be able to keep up to that level. I guess this had a knock on effect on my self-confidence.</p>	<p>Online context: Learning environment</p> <p>Videos – offered face-to-face connection. Significance of others</p>	<p>Identifies examples of helpful technology: discussion boards, web links, videos</p> <p>Different methods to suit needs of the learner</p>
<p>Third contact: Date sent: 22/3/2013 Date responded: 23/3/2013</p>		
<p>During your studies were there moments where you reflected upon/questioned your personal viewpoints/opinions in relation to your professional role or personal life? Please describe these moments and outline reasons why they made you reflect.</p> <p>I have thought long and hard about this question and I have tried to pinpoint one specific area that I have reflected upon and I don't think</p>		

<p>I have been able to do this. From the day I started my BACP I reflected upon myself both in a personal aspect as well as a professional one. Personally I looked upon my self-confidence and felt that areas that I thought I may have been knowledgeable in I started to doubt. I reviewed who I was as a person and a colleague. I always thought I was a good team worker but throughout the course I have realised that in fact I have moved from being a team practitioner to more of a 'lone advisor (not quite sure what other term to use).</p> <p>Discuss what surprised or has surprised you the most as a result of studying an online Childhood Practice Degree?</p> <p>That I passed!!!!!! No on a serious note I surprised myself that I got through the course juggling life, work and study and I still came out sane at the end. My main surprise was that I have more of a passion for study than I first thought. I have always enjoyed being a mature student and at times I could have happily have walked away from it but I did really enjoy it. I was surprised at the beginning about the overwhelming self-doubt as I thought I would feel quite ok studying. I know I sound as if am contradicting myself as in one hand I say I really enjoyed the experience and on the other hand the self-doubt that occurred but the level of self-doubt made me look at myself as a person rather than myself as a learner.</p>	<p>Changes in relation to self and work identity</p> <p>Disorientating dilemma. Potential for Change</p>	<p>Internal struggles</p> <p>Internal reflection</p>
<p>Third contact follow up</p> <p>Date sent 5/3/2013</p> <p>Date responded 26/3/2013</p>		
<p>You note that you began to doubt areas where you felt knowledgeable and that this had an impact on your self-confidence. Can you explore this in a bit more detail for me. For example, why did you begin to doubt? What was it that made you begin to doubt in relation to your studies?</p> <p>I felt that I had an sound knowledge on the legislation that were a basis within a childcare setting i.e. Children Scotland Act, National Care Standards, UNCRC, but when I started the course and looked deeper into legislation and the theory that underpinned this, it made me think about the knowledge that I had and how I</p>	<p>Change</p>	<p>Developing knowledge</p>

<p>didn't know much at all. It made me think about the jobs that I did and whether I was capable of working within them, especially my assessor role, as I felt that if my knowledge was minimal did I truly have the skills to undertake these roles. I have always been very average in my grades throughout my education - gaining all 3's in my standard grades and knew that my grades would be average but I felt people, especially those at my work always placed me on a higher pedestal. I had this battle going on with knowing that I did have a base knowledge and the reason I was undertaking the BA was to deeper/widen this knowledge but the self-doubt was there thinking 'what if I fail'. Not quite sure if I have explained that quite fully, if you need more just let me know.</p> <p>In what ways did you begin to review who you were as a person and a colleague and how did your studies place you in this position? I am particularly interested in how studying an online Childhood Practice Degree affected you in this way.</p> <p>I guess in the beginning the BA started to make me reflect on my own self when I started to doubt my own skills and knowledge. During this I looked upon the skills that I was giving to my setting. When starting the BA I also started into a new nursery. Within a few months of starting the role we got a new Principal Teacher (PT) for the nursery. She was not impressed that I would often refer to best practice as per my studying or when I would discuss things I had read and how they could be best implemented within the nursery. She would often dismiss my ideas which then started me to doubt if in fact things that I were suggesting were best practice. I looked at the style I had as a practitioner and saw that other staff liked to lead the planning and do what they wanted whether it was best for the children or not. This made me feel that I was 'on my own' with my ideas which caused me to again question whether my own skills as a practitioner were good enough to be in the role that I was. I found myself when working towards the end of my degree to stop questioning my own abilities and to work the way that I felt was right and to do what I needed to be part of the team even though I didn't always agree with it, but this was the only way I felt I could work. Part of me felt this was the easy way out but I no longer had the battle in</p>	<p>Disorientating dilemma. Potential for Change</p> <p>Self-doubt: Adult learner</p> <p>Disorientating: Potential for Change</p> <p>A Change noted here: transformation</p>	<p>base.</p> <p>Internal struggles</p> <p>Lack of recognition</p> <p>Sense of personal</p>
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<p>me to say that some of the practice wasn't always the best, so instead of the degree raising standards across the board, it has raised standards and knowledge for myself and hopefully by slowly showing best practice others may follow.</p> <p>I am interested in knowing more about ways in which your self-doubt made you look at yourself as a person rather than a learner and how studying an online Childhood Practice Degree affected you in this way. Can you explore this in a bit more detail for me?</p> <p>I think I have partly covered this in the above questions. The self-doubt that I felt caused me to lack a lot of self-confidence. So when doing assignments I would often go into it with that little voice in the back of my head thinking "oh I am going to fail this, I don't know enough to do this, what will my lecturers think when they read this". I found it very difficult to read my work back as I would often re read my work and delete the whole lot as I felt that the work was not good enough. This did improve as I went into my second year as I felt that I had a bit more confidence in my learning and I started to feel that I knew what level 9 work should look like.</p> <p>What I did really like about the BA is that it was online, as I feel it easier to discuss my viewpoints via on-line discussions, as I can reflect on what I have said before it gets posted, and make sure it makes sense to myself and hopefully others</p>	<p>Change</p> <p>Internal barriers: disorientating. Potential for Change</p> <p>Change</p> <p>Online context: Learning environment</p>	<p>frustration</p>
<p>Fourth contact</p> <p>Date sent 16/4/2013</p> <p>Date responded 19/4/2013</p>		
<p>Outline the ways in which studying an online Childhood Practice Degree affected you both personally and professionally.</p> <p>Personally it made me look at who I was. I would say I went through a real review of who I was and how I was prioritising my life. It made me realise that I had confidence issues in my own abilities both personally and professionally. It did make me realise though that I do have a passion for learning and enjoy looking and researching current practice and learning new</p>	<p>Change</p>	<p>Potential transformation</p>

<p>things.</p> <p>In what ways has your view of the world, your life and professional identity been affected as a result of studying an online Childhood Practice Degree?</p> <p>As previously mentioned when reviewing my confidence issues I had to reflect on if this was due to the way I viewed issues or the way I was viewed by others. It was a mix of both. It is interesting how when you want to improve your own self that others can be very disapproving of this and when you discuss things you have read about this just gets ignored. I felt it was not viewed upon favourably that I was doing the degree and no interest was taken on how I was doing. On a personal note I have felt great achievement and was supported well throughout so it proved to me that professionally I am not surrounded by supportive positive people which has made me review where I plan to work in the future.</p> <p>Imagine your best friend was asked to describe you before, during and after you completed an online Childhood Practice Degree. How would they respond?</p> <p>Before study I would say incomplete and restless. Home life was settled but on a professional level ready for a change and a new challenge.</p> <p>During I think I would be described as stressed, up and down and questioning life and how it was progressing.</p> <p>Once complete I think I would be described as elated. Now I am delighted with my achievement but still looking for that next step on a professional level.</p>	<p>Change</p> <p>Change: transformation</p> <p>Disorientating. Potential for Change</p>	<p>Potential transformation</p> <p>Lack of recognition</p>
<p>Fifth contact</p> <p>Date sent 22/4/2013</p> <p>Date responded 26/4/2013</p>		
<p>Reflecting on the online learning environment can you explore in what ways this environment assisted your learning experiences and why?</p> <p>Through being able to do the course online it</p>		

<p>has meant that I can do the course. If it was face to face there is no way I would have been able to become a student as I am unable to give up my work. By having all the materials online it meant that I could access the work when I had time and could touch in with students at a time that fitted in with work and life. I think the online learning is a wonderful way for mature students to be able to get back into learning as you can fit it around your life.</p> <p>In what ways this environment made it more challenging for you to learn and why?</p> <p>I am very much a kinaesthetic learner. I find it very hard to read long texts and to try and understand meaning from them. The online experience did not always suit my learning style but I did find a solution where I always tried to relate what I was reading to a practical situation to try and visualise how I would put this knowledge or theory into practice. I also found it difficult how to 'take' people. Again I am a person that likes to see people and experience them in the 'flesh' to know how I feel and found that I sometimes was put off people by their comments or the way they 'spoke' to others and felt I was judging people without even knowing them, but that is a poor trait on my part. Maybe getting students to upload a photo or a short blog on your tube giving a short insight to who they are may help this?</p> <p>Reflecting on the module tutors, can you tease out in what ways they assisted and/or challenged your learning experiences. Were there particular characteristics that assisted/challenged you; what were these and why did they assist/challenge you?</p> <p>I found all the tutors very supportive in their own way. I found it very beneficial having you tube links to video tutorials as again this helped with my learning style. I enjoyed nothing better than sitting with a coffee, note pad and pen and listening to how the assignment should be tackled, for me this was the best assignment strategy as it clarified or made you question your assignment plans.</p> <p>Some of the tutors had their 'quirks' and you were left questioning what was meant by certain texts, but I feel that it prepares you for working with different styles of people and personalities</p>	<p>Online context: Learning environment</p> <p>Adult learner</p> <p>Online context: Learning environment</p> <p>Online context: impact on Relationships. Significance of others</p> <p>Online context: Learning environment</p> <p>Relationships: Significance</p>	<p>Online context meeting needs of adult learner</p> <p>Challenges of online context</p> <p>Benefits of online videos. 'Face-to-face' contact</p>
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<p>and sometimes just asking what was meant and you find they give you an explanation within a way that you understand.</p> <p>Are you able to identify any 'turning points' during your studies? For example, a point where you felt things 'clicked' or you began to have a different self-view or your professional identity altered. Explore these for me and outline reasons why.</p> <p>Yes. I found it very hard to write academically. I felt when I went into the second part of the second year I got it a bit more. I never used to read my own work as I would feel that it was so awful I would delete the whole thing and start again so would ask other to so this for me. Once I started reading my own work I would be less critical on the content and would start looking at the structure. I still feel I have a way to go with my academic writing but at least I know where my areas are to make improvements on.</p> <p>As for my own self, I feel that I have grown in confidence throughout this and can now see what I have achieved. I do feel that I have come to a natural end working with children and would love to develop my career in supporting others within their childcare careers or working with families and children that require advice and support, the world is now my oyster!!</p>	<p>of others</p> <p>Potential for Change</p> <p>Potential for Change</p>	<p>Internal struggles</p>
<p>Sixth Contact</p> <p>Date sent 26/4/2013</p> <p>Date responded 26/4/2013</p>		
<p>To conclude your email interview I would like to offer you an opportunity to openly reflect on the interview process. Can you please share with me your thoughts, views, feelings on the email interview process? It may be useful for you to go back and read all your responses as a starting point.</p> <p>I felt the email interview was fine. It gave an opportunity to give an honest opinion although I did sometimes feel that I did not explain myself as clear as I could have. When going through your questions I did get emotional at times as my degree was a roller coaster of emotions. If it had been a face to face interview I may not have been so honest as I may have hidden my emotions.</p>		<p>Benefit of email interview</p>

<p>Finally, select one word that describes/reflects how you feel as a result of completing an online Childhood Practice Degree.</p> <p>To sum the degree up in one word.... Evaluative!!</p>		
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Appendix I: Data analysis stages 3 and 4

Thread: Changes

Stage 3: Emerging themes

Stage 4: Emerging sub-themes

Changes: Participants' responses	Emerging themes	Emerging sub-themes
Louise		
<p>Managing a workplace project was reflective throughout as it involved identifying an area to develop in practice. This made you more aware of evaluating other areas in need of development. Working in partnership with other agencies highlighted the barriers which prevented inter agency working. I was able to reflect, sympathise and understand more fully how working together can be problematic. The initiatives unit made me reflect on how the work of other organisations and/or agencies can be developed into practice. It made me really think about my attitude to inclusion for all children and families.....I became aware of how inclusion for all meant that everyone's welfare had to be taken account of. It made me really think about my attitude to inclusion for all children and families. I became aware of how inclusion for all meant that everyone's welfare had to be taken account of'</p>	Incomplete transformation	<p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p>
<p>Personally the BACP has affected me personally because at the beginning I felt achieving a degree was out of my league! My main aim was to accomplish diploma level. As a result of studying this course I have more confidence in my own abilities. Professionally, I am more willing to express my own ideas and</p>	Incomplete transformation	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>

<p>opinions. Beforehand, I would have went with the 'flow' and not conveyed my thoughts. I would probably have avoided team conflict at all costs. Now, I would question working practices/ be much more reflective. And as a result I suggest more ideas on how things could be adapted/changed for the better and be able to justify confidently the reasoning behind my thoughts.</p> <p>I would say I am more laid back and not so easily stressed out if things don't go according to plan. I used to worry about the 'nitty gritty' day to day challenges. But now I just think 'well, well that can be discussed and sorted. I have contemplated with the idea of doing primary teaching. I believe I would have the confidence in my own abilities to attempt this as a result of studying the BACP.</p> <p>Before doing the BACP I would say I lacked confidence regarding my academic abilities and self-confidence to even attempt the BACP. During the BACP I began to become more aware of my personal identity. This degree encouraged positive thinking, and how aspects in working practice can be tackled differently to improve the service. I would say my personal identity has changed as I began to believe in myself through gaining more knowledge about how teams work and the importance of being able to challenge the thoughts of others. Beforehand I would not have had the confidence to challenge others and would have went with the flow. After doing the degree I feel I now have the confidence to speak up for myself and for service users. I also believe as a result of studying this degree I would have the confidence to attempt other degrees or posts that require more leading and managing roles at some point. Beforehand I would not have looked at these job positions.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Behavioural</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Developing knowledge and understanding</p> <p>Attitudinal and Behavioural</p>
<p>Kathleen</p>		
<p>One of the things I realised as I studied was how my workplace poorly managed its main</p>		

<p>assets - ie staff. A large team, with lots of different backgrounds and skills really lacked a knowledgeable, hands on key person to maximise this. Also, I felt that many of the tasks I was asked to do in modules were things that all of the work team should have been knowing about. Had I not done the further study I would possibly never have gained these basics, and then more in depth experiences and knowledge. So, it didn't make me cynical about the workplace exactly. But it did make me see that there were a lot of wasted opportunities. Our manager at that time was a closed door kind of person, and whilst autonomy in the job was good for some, we could have been so much stronger and better.</p> <p>I definitely enjoyed studying. It woke my brain up and gave me a new skill set, particularly for ICT which I hadn't used much. It also made me manage time and tasks and I felt a real sense of achievement, and a reason to proud of myself as I advanced through it. I feel I was more confident in my own work practice and when engaging with others, as I could link reasons for doing certain things with theory or research I had learned about.</p> <p>Being online helped me to become much more computer literate both because I had to, and because I spent so much more time at it that I improved.</p> <p>I really think that by the time I got to the play module, identified with it and got my highest mark, I felt I was starting to benefit. This gave me some confidence in speaking out about change at work.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Attitudinal Behavioural</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Behavioural</p>
Eilidh		
<p>I feel I am now more confident, personally and professionally. Personally I felt making decisions about my life were easier. I felt I had and could achieve more academically. Professionally, it gave me confidence in what I was doing. I felt confident in using what I had in learned in studying the BACP. I also I felt I had more of an awareness</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal Behavioural Developing knowledge and</p>

<p>of what initiatives, legislation, policies we were using. I felt I had more knowledge than I did have and I could speak up more. I also felt I was more reflective in my work. The BACP has made me knowledgeable - it helped me understand why we had/have to do what we do ie policies etc.</p> <p>I was more confident in myself and my abilities. I was proud of myself and my achievements.</p> <p>In general, BACP increased my knowledge and understanding on lots of different subjects and issues, such as policies and policy making, different documents and initiatives and learning lots of information about my project topic - music. BACP also positively developed my relationships with professionals from outside agencies because I was able to further my knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of why we need to work with them. I also feel I am more supportive towards students, as a result of BACP, because I know how I felt in modules where I received more support.</p> <p>Completing my degree gave me the confidence to apply for a higher position. I really think it was the degree that gave me the confidence to go for the job (which I got). If I hadn't completed the degree I don't think I would have gone for the job.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Understanding</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>
<p>Michelle</p>		
<p>However on reflection the only thing that I can say perhaps is that my study has made me believe that effective team working and sharing of information is valuable to supporting all development and leaning. I have learned that taking people's good qualities and building a team gives an excellence to working performances. Prior to studying I usually did most of my work on an individual basis as I knew that it would be done. However I now know that giving the right task to the appropriate person enhances performance within the</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p>

<p>setting. Knowing the strengths of each team member and using them effectively is the answer.</p> <p>The knowledge that I have gained during my study has supported my decision making, team performance and given me the confidence to voice my opinion when I know that something is not appropriate.</p> <p>Personally and both professionally studying the BACP gave me a lot more confidence. It gave me the knowledge to work with an enhanced outlook and with improved ability. Personally I feel that I was also very successful with time management issues but studying has made me aware of what is important and what can be left undone until another day.</p> <p>I feel that I think about the world around us more especially the way in which other countries support their children during their educational years. I am more interested in comparing ideas and learning about other cultures.</p> <p>As for my personal life I feel that I am probably more understanding of other people's opinions and value them even if they differ from mine. (I would never have done that before my BA).</p> <p>Given me the confidence to voice my opinion when I know something is not appropriate</p> <p>After my study they might say that I am frustrated a lot of the time professionally as I can see things/issues not being dealt with quick enough or marked as priority and this annoys me.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Behavioural</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding Behavioural</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding affecting behavioural</p>
<p>Fiona</p>		
<p>Professionally it has given me a heightened awareness of childcare initiatives along with the different childcare practices. I also feel more confident in my role as a practitioner and having the background knowledge into theories and/or ideas gives a heightened empathy into how</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Developing knowledge and Understanding Attitudinal</p>

everyday experiences influence each child's development.		
Marea		
<p>Throughout the course we were encouraged to reflect on our practice but I would say it was whilst studying the contemporary issues module that I really thought about how much our/my own values/views/beliefs influence our practice and how these are often formed from experience, just accepted and not always thought through. This module made me think more closely about the institution of marriage the configuration of family groupings and the changing role of women. I realized that the nuclear family was a very recent concept and although governments would proclaim it the norm/ideal this is probably an unrealistic aspiration and not a true reflection of the reality for a large proportion of families. As I had been brought up happily in a traditional nuclear family and went on to replicate this model initially in my own life I hadn't really thought any more deeply about it and naively clung to the belief that this model was ultimately the best. Although I became a single parent family I still held to this notion and it was only whilst studying I realized that there is and always has been a myriad of family groupings (I suppose I had always known this but never really assimilated it) this made me wonder if I subconsciously treated families differently based on their configuration. I know that I personally still battle with the notion that I have failed my children by not continuing to bring them up in a traditional family grouping so does this mean that if I think/thought one way is best that the others are bad? Do I have a subconscious scale of what is good, bad, acceptable or non-acceptable? Although I do not have definitive answers to these questions I feel that the very fact that I question my beliefs and values helps me be more open to evaluating and if necessary altering my practice. I think it is healthy to challenge our thinking and question why we believe a certain thing and</p>	Transformation	Ways of being

<p>look at how that belief influences how we are and how we act and ultimately how that affects our professional practice.</p> <p>I have come to realize that gaining a degree is not necessarily about being "clever" but about learning new skills, learning how to write and present information in a specified way. People from my generation and background saw degrees as something special and for the minority, for an elitist group of intelligent people. I now understand that it is much less about intelligence and more a skill which can be learnt to some extent. Having said that I am really proud of myself for managing to gain this qualification,(although it's still not sunk in yet) I think it is important that people see learning as an ongoing thing and I think it sends a good message to others(including my children) that you are never too old to study.</p>	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal
<p>I have realized it is a very true saying that "you don't know what you don't know" and studying this course has opened my eyes to being prepared to look at things which at first may seem less necessary/ appealing and the benefits this brings through adding breadth and depth to existing knowledge. Another thing which I am surprised about is that I now feel slightly at a loss, I am not sure if I miss the stimulation of studying or if I just haven't readjusted back into full focus on work again. I thought I would feel so happy once it was finished but I must admit to missing it.</p>	Incomplete transformation	Developing knowledge and Understanding
<p>I started from a position of feeling really disempowered, where I felt I was a failure and could not achieve I believed that I was competent and good at my job but my academic marks did not bear this out so it made me feel insecure and inferior in my position of manager and I was frightened that I would fail the course and lose my job and that everyone would think I was a fraud. After scraping through the first year and starting to get a bit better marks this increased my confidence and I</p>	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal

<p>began to tentively believe I could do it and I began to see the qualification as validation, I began to have a bit more self-belief and certainly at the end I was proud of what I had achieved if not a little relieved that I wasn't going to be exposed as being rubbish at my job. On reflection I did very much see the qualification as being an endorsement of my right and ability to be a manager.</p> <p>The degree does give me a feeling of confidence that my understanding and knowledge is backed up by a recognised qualification.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>
<p>Lorna</p>		
<p>There is no doubt the thought of undertaking a degree is daunting. I classed it as an academic qualification which rightly or wrongly I associated with a reasonable level of academic intelligence. I do consider myself determined and highly motivated but there was a fear of not having the necessary skills to complete it and the fear of failure even before I started. I was determined that I would succeed and although it was hard work the feeling of elation when I got my first marks back (and subsequent marks) was amazing I honestly felt like I had climbed Everest it felt so good. Being a mature student I think the sense of achievement combined with holding down a job and running a family makes you realise the skill you have.</p> <p>I don't think I would have ever thought I was capable of completing a degree it seemed far too high brow for someone who had not previously been to college or university</p> <p>The biggest surprise has been how long the sense of achievement has lasted. I still find myself smiling whenever I talk about gaining my degree, it never ceases to amaze me how chuffed I am with my own achievement, I would say it took a few months to sink in that all the hard work paid off and actually it was all my own</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>

<p>work and only I was responsible.</p> <p>It made me question every aspect of my practice, why I was doing something, what could I do to make it better next time and to get others to get used to this type of reflective practice</p> <p>Not a day passes when I don't think about how it has changed me. I am more confident, ready to challenge, question and provoke thinking in others. I now question everything I do, evaluate and reflect. I am now much more interested in why we do something and read research with a more discerning eye.</p> <p>the degree has opened my eyes to the importance of early attachments and we as a workforce can make a difference.</p> <p>my one word would be amazing, it was an amazing opportunity to study in a convenient way to fit my lifestyle, amazing to complete and achieve a degree as a full time working mum something I never thought I would ever be able to do</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Behavioural and Attitudinal</p> <p>Behavioural and attitudinal</p> <p>Developing knowledge and understanding</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>
<p>Terry</p>		
<p>I did appreciate the experience of the study and believe it has made me a more skilled and competent Manager by reflecting, researching, and more understanding of delivery for the provision and Team. More assured, confident and structured in management delivery, with more understanding and self-reflection.</p> <p>anxieties appeared due to the other Managers within the local area formed a 'study group' and openly excluded me from the group. It was interesting for me to recognise the old feelings of insecurities and rejection and how I found myself having to deal with 'why me – what have I done to be excluded? Fortunately with support of my family and accepting the situation, I realised that it was okay, perhaps their friendships were more established and I would need to find support in other places – family,</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p>	<p>Behavioural and Attitudinal</p> <p>Ways of being</p>

<p>friends and the local college tutor. Eventually I found strength when I decided that perhaps these ‘old spooks’ may have manifested because I was studying again and feelings may have got mixed by my old experiences of school, studying and what I was emotionally carrying around from my younger years, that as an adult I could finally ‘let go’!</p> <p>Old spooks’ – yes, I did ‘relive’ previous educational experiences and group dynamics (school was tough and education in an extremely deprived area of London in the early 70’s, was all about the ‘survival of the fittest’). This also exposed within me the fear of feeling a failure and ‘being found out’ that I’m not ‘good enough’ to be in the position of a Manager academically, (This is a little ‘heavy’, but it’s all about self-esteem issues)... then our Board would have to find someone else to take my place because I couldn’t registrar with the SSSC as a Manager with the relevant qualifications.</p> <p>Letting go’ is all about working through - I’m not that teenager anymore and my experience of family support and love is very different now than it was then. It’s amazing how I thought I had ‘moved on’ from difficult experiences and life gives you different life choices that may ‘touch’ on dormant or suppressed emotions. For me, I believe that the time was right for me to finally ‘let go’ because the circumstances presented the environment in which to do so.</p> <p>I have always worried about my academic ability, therefore I thought the thought of aiming for a BA, I believed was truly out of my reach and I felt the dread of participating.</p>	<p>Transformation cont.</p> <p>Transformation cont.</p>	<p>Ways of being</p> <p>Ways of being</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>
Shona		
<p>Doing the BACP made me more confident in both my personal and professional life. I know that I have been in this profession for over 20 years and I feel I had and have a lot of knowledge in this field but I do feel that I am more able and keen to research areas that I am</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Behavioural</p>

<p>interested in and take ideas forward and stand up for what I feel is right even although we get knocked back all the time because of funding. Personally I have always felt very insecure as I was picked out at secondary school as being stupid so I began to focus more and more on what I did well which was sport. I feel I am still having to fight sometimes for a voice but having done my BACP I have the confidence to do it. It was the cement that I needed for my bricks if that makes sense.</p> <p>I feel that I am more assertive than I was before starting my studying. Other professionals do seem to have more respect and I am very happy to take the lead in areas. For example: Transitions from nursery in to school. I would no longer wait for the schools to contact me. Instead I usually make the first contact and organise visits so our children don't miss out. I often felt before doing the BA that I was possibly not as able to put my thoughts and ideas across as well as I should, but with the up to date knowledge that I have gained, I do feel I am more able to stand my corner.</p> <p>Before BACP I often felt that other professionals viewed me as just someone from the private sector who just cared for children rather than being able to look at what we actually did do for the children and families that attend our setting. During BACP other professionals began to ask my opinion and at least seem as if they were interested slightly in what I had to say. After BACP I have a much better rapport with the LA teachers and health specialists who know that I have done my degree.</p> <p>I do feel I am more able to stand my corner....I feel that I am more assertive....made me more confident in both my personal and professional life.</p>	Transformation	Work identity
	Transformation	Work identity
	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal
Kate		
I quite like to question myself and my opinions, I found that during the study it allowed me to look		

<p>at myself as a person and also look at the way in which I worked and allowed me to reflect on my practice and on myself. It allowed me to look closely at the way in which I did things and change/improve areas where I thought I could do better.</p> <p>In a professional manner it has allowed me to look closely at the way in which I work and question the way I do things, in a way that it allows me to look at what I am doing, how I could maybe do it differently and achieve better results.</p> <p>Professionally as silly as it sounds I feel more qualified now to do my job, before I completed the BACP I didn't have anything to stand out from any of my colleagues and I feel that when having the responsibility of a service and service users than you should have more qualifications and skills to bring to the service and pass through to your team.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p>	<p>Behavioural</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Work identity</p>
Ronnie		
<p>I would say that I have gained confidence in myself by achieving this degree and what I am capable of. Not to boast but I am quite proud of myself and what I have achieved. Professionally I have come to realise that through the course I was being reminded of a lot of things. It has made me look at my practice and make changes to improve the setting.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p>
Janet		
<p>Boosted my self-confidence and self-worth.</p> <p>Reinvigorated and more professional. Confident and able to hold my own within any group.</p> <p>For someone coming for a non-academic background suddenly having to be expected to be au fait with 'degree speak', it was a challenge to learn this as well as the content of the course</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p>

Leslie		
Although I had successfully run my own nursery for 15 years, success in gaining the BACP has made me feel much more confident, particularly in working with professionals from other children's services.	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal
It has broadened my view of the world, particularly professionally. This by working with a wide variety of students and tutors. Their knowledge, opinions and personalities have broadened my outlook on the world. They were often very different from my opinions knowledge and personality which I found all very interesting making me think about and challenge my own opinions knowledge and attitudes.	Incomplete transformation	Developing knowledge and Understanding
After I was more confident and enthusiastic and keen to pass on new knowledge and ideas with colleagues. Throughout the course I was intermittently enthused, challenged, stressed and ultimately was proud of my achievement and brought fresh enthusiasm and motivation to my workplace.	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal and Behavioural
I became more professionally confident on completion of the Integrated Services unit. This unit gave me a clearer understanding of roles and the obstacles to integrated working. It made me aware that this was a difficult area for all professions. It also gave me tools to address some of the difficulties I had experienced and a greater appreciation of to make integrated working a success.	Incomplete transformation	Developing knowledge and Understanding
There was not actually anything completely new to me on the course but my depth of knowledge based on theory was very much extended and improved. Made me look at my practice in far more depth than I had ever before.	Incomplete transformation	Developing knowledge and Understanding
The confidence I talk about is in my professional role. Simply by having the qualification I feel on a more equal level when working with other professionals. Before the degree I felt I was often dismissed as a nursery worker. Sadly the	Transformation	Work identity

role of nursery practitioner does not seem to me to be given much recognition by other professionals. I do not know if the BACP changes this but it but having it makes me more confident.		
Linda		
It has developed my self-esteem and confidence. Also I have a much more in depth knowledge which I have been able to use within the nursery.	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal and Developing knowledge and Understanding
Catriona		
<p>I was pushed out of my comfort zone, challenged about many things and how I thought about myself and my role both in the setting and the wider community. I felt quite high about what I'd done however as time has passed it was important for me to square things away and have an understanding of what has happened, turning my success into a normal thing as it were.</p> <p>Feel I don't have to prove myself so much, I can relax a bit more as another bit of my personal jigsaw is in place as it were.</p> <p>My horizons have definitely been broadened. Due to interacting with other student I have learnt about other work situations and experiences. Course work has also informed me about childhood in the wider world.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p>
Susan		
I felt the whole course made me reflect upon my personal viewpoints which in turn directly influences my professional role. It is also easy to 'get stuck in a rut' sometimes and do the same things without questioning it. So for me the course made me stop and think, use the knowledge I was learning and question my	Incomplete transformation	Developing knowledge and Understanding

<p>viewpoints related to my professional role more than my personal life.</p> <p>It has definitely increased my confidence. I am a much more reflective practitioner - I always was reflective but am even more so since BACP and use my knowledge to back up what I am saying. I will also do research to back up my thoughts so I can put forward my thoughts to colleagues. My computer skills are better and have on occasions used these.</p> <p>I do feel that I know what I am talking about through my increased knowledge and experiences and I have the confidence to say what I want to say. Even to the teachers - even when I don't always agree with what they are saying because I am able to justify what I am saying.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation Transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Developing knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Attitudinal and Behavioural</p> <p>Work identity</p>
<p>Charlotte</p>		
<p>Mum said just tell them the truth, I replied what 'please take me even though I am thick as mince and can't spell'. Mum looked worried then hung her head and said. No tell them that you were tested when you were little and they said you had dyslexia but they told us just to say nothing as that would be best for you as you would be labelled at school. I looked at my mum and said ok but that night I lay awake thinking maybe I wasn't thick after all maybe just maybe I might have a chance.</p> <p>but it's sort of like looking at a map when you don't have a clue about maps I look at the question and I see lots of roads that lead in different directions and I don't have a clue which to follow so I just stand and stare around which then starts to open up more roads and so it goes on until I am standing in the middle of spaghetti junction.</p> <p>I did put a piece of work up near the end of the course and that was a Huge thing for me as it was like putting myself out there knowing I would get ridiculed and made to feel stupid but</p>	<p>Beginnings of Transformation</p> <p>Disorientation</p>	<p>Self-view</p> <p>Self-view</p>

<p>that didn't happen and it felt amazing and it was all thanks to one lecturer that cared enough to want to help. That simple gesture changed me it gave me confidence and pride in myself 2 things I had never really had this was later proven to have affected me forever as I was able to sit in a room with hundreds of people (something I would never do before) and then on top of that get up on stage in front of them all. All thanks to one person's kindness and understanding.</p>	Transformation	
<p>posting my work on the board was huge for me. To be totally honest I did it more to say thank you to the course leader than for myself I hoped it would prove how much she had helped me if I could just get past my own insecurities . For myself I wanted to prove I could put a bit of work up and not care if others laughed or made comments about it but I never went back to look and see if anyone had said anything it was too hard which I think comes from my school years were I was ridiculed or ignored by both teachers and peers when u spend all of your school life being treated like a fool you chose not to want to learn and hide when you can and posting on the board is the opposite of that. But because I had archived so much, not one fail, I thought ok the course leader says to put it up she would not tell me to do it if she knew it was rubbish as she is not like that so ok I will do it and she will be happy and I will have overcome another barrier.</p>	Transformation	Self-view
<p>She would say before I was scared of looking thick, during I was a night mare and was constantly doubting myself, after she would say I was relived and much more confident.</p>	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal
<p>My view of the world has changed because I now understand that I see everything differently to everyone else. I am scared of things that are not clear cut as it becomes too much for me to work out or understand, in my life I no longer see myself as a waste of space as I have achieved something that others see as important</p>	Transformation	Self-view
<p>when I finished the course I had to start thinking</p>		Self-view

about myself differently I could no longer believe what I had been told all my life as now I had proof that I wasn't thick I have a degree this was hard to believe but I am getting better.	Transformation	Self-view
Flora		
<p>An Early Years worker has a unique professional identity which is at times difficult to define. On one hand they move and communicate with young children and often troubled families- for this to happen they need to have good interpersonal skill and a love of working with these young families and on the other to make this happen they need a base of knowledge that covers every aspect of development, understand and often anticipate problems and solutions which brings power and responsibility. I hadn't realised or truly thought of this before then.</p> <p>The module on co-operation, etc was useful at examining the 'system' of a holistic approach to children's welfare- getting it right ...- I saw myself differently after that. I saw myself as valuable and perhaps a keystone to better services for the children and families I work with. I recognised the leadership skills I had and confidently criticised the system!</p> <p>My professional identity has changed from feeling like a novice and a follower to being a leader in the field of early years. I feel part of a bigger movement- that of the early years. I will repeat what I said to you before- the degree has given me courage and self- respect. I recognise the power that I have as an individual professional responsible for her own self-improvement, and also the power that the sector could potentially have as an influential movement or think tank. Would this have happened before the degree? Possibly, but the power and professionalism would not have been recognised by other professionals.</p> <p>The biggest surprise is the reaction of other people. The value I have in other people's eyes</p>	<p>Transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p>	<p>Work identity</p> <p>Work identity</p> <p>Work identity</p> <p>Work identity</p>

<p>has increased but often this does not happen until I start speaking to other professionals and they hear and respond to a well-informed, articulate and equally confident and competent professional.</p>	Transformation	Work identity
<p>I talk more confidently about my thoughts and feelings on early childhood. I feel I can justify and support my views because I have gathered a wealth of information and because I value what I think. The change is I didn't really comment on anything before. For several reasons: I was reserved, felt ill-informed and perhaps a bit insular or less globally aware of other professionals.</p>	Transformation	Work identity
<p>The modules I followed realised my belief in the importance of me, that there is a national and global community of interest and support I feel confident to belong to. I now a professional when before I was simply a person who played in nursery. There is no chance this would have happened before the BA. The BACP opened up what was already inside me.</p>	Incomplete transformation	Attitudinal
<p>Overlaps into my personal life of the effects of the BA, such as parenting skills and encouraging active listening which I share with my husband.</p>	Transformation	Ways of being
<p>I've been a nursery assistant for so long, it is sometimes difficult to separate the personas of me Angela as a friend, mum and wife and me, Angela the educator. For many years I wondered what the point of nursery and therefore the point of me was? Now, this wasn't a crisis of 'why do I exist?' But a thought of why I was here? and why does it matter? Why this mattered to me was buried under family obligations and a security that I was under the supervision of a class teacher. I shrugged this off with my children growing up and policy changes happening. I then really began to reflect on 'what's the point of me?'</p>	Transformation	Ways of being
<p>Times I was awake at night with sudden insights or phrases. It happened gradually. At first I was overwhelmed with figuring out what texts were</p>		

<p>telling me. Then it changed to quoting things to myself or a phrase that would describe a point I was trying to make in an essay. It's fair to describe this process as writing essays in my dreams and thoughts. This increased as deadlines approached. I was excited by the process but at the same time distressed by the lack of sleep. I wrote extensively and this is the way I figure out my whole life - studying was an extension of this. If I am troubled this is how I cope. I was clearly not coping when I look back, not so much that I was having a breakdown, but that I was struggling to keep my thoughts cohesive. It really wasn't an easy time. I felt disorganised all the time – the pile of books and notes, scraps of paper and highlighter pens in the living room corner could have been a metaphor for how my brain worked during the entire time of studying. It's like being on a carousel and the BA throws you off balance to stand on firm ground, to examine the merry-go-round which is your life-both personal and professional. This was often very uncomfortable as it involved being critical as well self-congratulatory, neither of which comes naturally.</p> <p>The research modules and the assignment on current issues was a challenging time for both me and the nursery team as I brought a lot of thought and questions. The research and current issues modules were closely linked as they both involved pedagogy and methodology and I was at once stressed, elated and critical. My view of myself during that process changed and it was difficult to articulate why. I realised I was struggling to identify how I fitted into the role of an educator, in view of what the research was revealing.</p> <p>There's not just me in the nursery. There is not just a group of children playing in the nursery. There are not just my colleagues having a jolly time alongside me. There is a learning environment that is facilitated and managed by a person who recognises and values the effect such a learning environment has on the</p>	Transformation	Ways of being
	Transformation	Ways of being
	Transformation	Ways of being
	Transformation	Ways of being

<p>generations of children who attend the school. That person is me.</p> <p>A defining moment of course must be the Childhood Practice Conference which I presented a PPP on the degree. It was a powerful moment for me, encapsulating everything that happened to me in heart, mind, body and soul as a result of the degree in changing from a nursery assistant to a professional.</p> <p>What I feel is that the BA has given me the courage and confidence to consider myself as someone who could make a difference to the other professionals in the Early Years. I think this has since crystallised with the interview I had with the SSSC on the merits of the BA. For the first time, it was clear that I had choices to make in pursuing a move to another aspect of the Early Years namely informing, nurturing, supporting and training new students and candidates to the profession. Would this have happened without the degree? I don't think so. I have opinions and views, a positive outlook in developing children's voices, a very positive belief in a continuing professional development and I think I could make a difference to children's learning environment by influencing the professionals that care for and guide them. It's not really leaving the profession but being there in a different capacity.</p>	<p>Transformation</p> <p>Transformation</p>	<p>Ways of being</p> <p>Work identity</p> <p>Ways of being</p> <p>Work identity</p>
<p>Jo</p>		
<p>From the day I started my BACP I reflected upon myself both in a personal aspect as well as a professional one. Personally I looked upon my self-confidence and felt that areas that I thought I may have been knowledgeable in I started to doubt. I reviewed who I was as a person and a colleague. I always thought I was a good team worker but throughout the course I have realised that in fact I have moved from being a team practitioner to more of a 'lone advisor (not quite sure what other term to use).</p> <p>I was surprised at the beginning about the</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p>

<p>overwhelming self-doubt as I thought I would feel quite ok studying. I know I sound as if am contradicting myself as in one hand I say I really enjoyed the experience and on the other hand the self-doubt that occurred but the level of self-doubt made me look at myself as a person rather than myself as a learner.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p>
<p>I felt that I had a sound knowledge on the legislation that were a basis within a childcare setting i.e. Children Scotland Act, National Care Standards, UNCRC, but when I started the course and looked deeper into legislation and the theory that underpinned this, it made me think about the knowledge that I had and how I didn't know much at all. It made me think about the jobs that I did and whether I was capable of working within them, especially my assessor role, as I felt that if my knowledge was minimal did I truly have the skills to undertake these roles. I have always been very average in my grades throughout my education - gaining all 3's in my standard grades and knew that my grades would be average but I felt people, especially those at my work always placed me on a higher pedestal. I had this battle going on with knowing that I did have a base knowledge and the reason I was undertaking the BA was to deeper/widen this knowledge but the self-doubt was there thinking 'what if I fail'. Not quite sure if I have explained that quite fully, if you need more just let me know.</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Developing knowledge and understanding</p>
<p>I guess in the beginning the BA started to make me reflect on my own self when I started to doubt my own skills and knowledge. During this I looked upon the skills that I was giving to my setting. When starting the BA I also started into a new nursery. Within a few months of starting the role we got a new Principal Teacher (PT) for the nursery. She was not impressed that I would often refer to best practice as per my studying or when I would discuss things I had read and how they could be best implemented within the nursery. She would often dismiss my ideas which then started me to doubt if in fact things that I were suggesting were best</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Work identity</p>

<p>practice. I looked at the style I had as a practitioner and saw that other staff liked to lead the planning and do what they wanted whether it was best for the children or not. This made me feel that I was 'on my own' with my ideas which caused me to again question whether my own skills as a practitioner were good enough to be in the role that I was. I found myself when working towards the end of my degree to stop questioning my own abilities and to work the way that I felt was right and to do what I needed to be part of the team even though I didn't always agree with it, but this was the only way I felt I could work. Part of me felt this was the easy way out but I no longer had the battle in me to say that some of the practice wasn't always the best, so instead of the degree raising standards across the board, it has raised standards and knowledge for myself and hopefully by slowly showing best practice others may follow.</p> <p>I think I have partly covered this in the above questions. The self-doubt that I felt caused me to lack a lot of self-confidence. So when doing assignments I would often go into it with that little voice in the back of my head thinking "oh I am going to fail this, I don't know enough to do this, what will my lecturers think when they read this". I found it very difficult to read my work back as I would often re read my work and delete the whole lot as I felt that the work was not good enough. This did improve as I went into my second year as I felt that I had a bit more confidence in my learning and I started to feel that I knew what level 9 work should look like.</p> <p>Personally it made me look at who I was. I would say I went through a real review of who I was and how I was prioritising my life. It made me realise that I had confidence issues in my own abilities both personally and professionally. It did make me realise though that I do have a passion for learning and enjoy looking and researching current practice and learning new</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Behavioural</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Attitudinal</p>
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<p>things.</p> <p>As previously mentioned when reviewing my confidence issues I had to reflect on if this was due to the way I viewed issues or the way I was viewed by others. It was a mix of both. It is interesting how when you want to improve your own self that others can be very disapproving of this and when you discuss things you have read about this just gets ignored. I felt it was not viewed upon favourably that I was doing the degree and no interest was taken on how I was doing. On a personal note I have felt great achievement and was supported well throughout so it proved to me that professionally I am not surrounded by supportive positive people which has made me review where I plan to work in the future.</p> <p>As for my own self, I feel that I have grown in confidence throughout this and can now see what I have achieved. I do feel that I have come to a natural end working with children and would love to develop my career in supporting others within their childcare careers or working with families and children that require advice and support, the world is now my oyster!!</p>	<p>Incomplete transformation</p> <p>Incomplete transformation</p>	<p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Work identity</p> <p>Attitudinal</p> <p>Work identity</p>
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